

JEEVADHARA

A JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION

Property of
Graduate Theological Union

FEB 12 1986

CONTEXTUALIZING THE PAPAL VISIT TO INDIA

INDIAN AND ORIENTAL CHRISTIAN
CONTEXT OF THEOLOGIZING

John B. Chethimattam

A MISSIOLOGY FOR INDIA

Anto Karokaran

COMPARATIVE THEOLOGY

Thomas Kochumuttom

EPISTEMOLOGY FOR AN INTER-CULTURAL
CONTEMPLATIVE THEOLOGY

Wayne Teasdale

September 1985

JEEVADHARA

is published every month
alternately in English and Malayalam

GENERAL EDITOR

Joseph Constantine Manalel

SECTION EDITORS

The Problem of Man

Thomas Vellilamthadam

The Word of God

J. M. Pathrapankal

The Living Christ

Samuel Rayan

The People of God

Kuncheria Pathil

The Meeting of Religions

John B. Chethimattam

The Fulness of Life

Felix Podimattam - Thomas Kalam

SECTIONAL BOARD OF EDITORS

Raimundo Panikkar

Ignatius Puthiadam

EDITOR - BOOK REVIEW

J. B. Chethimattam

(Contd on inside back-cover)

JEEVADHARA

The Meeting of Religions

**CONTEXTUALIZING
THE PAPAL VISIT TO INDIA**

Editor:

JOHN B. CHETHIMATTAM

Theology Centre
Kottayam - 686 017
Kerala, India

CONTENTS

Editorial	Page 343
Indian and Oriental Christian Context of Theologizing <i>John B. Chethimattam</i>	355
A Missiology for India <i>Anto Karokaran</i>	384
Comparative Theology <i>Thomas Kochumuttom</i>	395
Epistemology for an Inter-Cultural Contemplative Theology <i>Wayne Teasdale</i>	410

Editorial

Archbishop Simon I. Pimenta, President of the CBCI in a letter dated June 22, 1985 to the editor of his own paper *The Examiner* makes the following statement: "The reason or reasons for the Papal visit to India is not/are not any events or occasions, however significant or important they may be, that might be organized in any part of the country. This visit of the Holy Father is a 'pastoral visit' to the whole country. There is no special occasion or event on account of which the Holy Father is coming to India. Let this be clearly stated. And understood and accepted by all." By this solemn proclamation he corrects the earlier impression given wide publicity that the occasion for the Holy Father's visit was the centenary of "the establishment of the Indian hierarchy" on September 1, 1886. It was made abundantly clear by all who had any knowledge of history that this was a serious error concerning historical events. What was established on September 1, 1886 was not *the* Indian hierarchy but only a Latin hierarchy. The hierarchy of the Church of the St. Thomas Christians existed here from time immemorial. Even the Latin hierarchy was here at least from the sixteenth century. But the crucial question raised by the statement of the president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India is what the scope and meaning of a "pastoral visit" of the Holy Father is, totally detached from any events or occasions of the churches he is visiting? The pastoral letter of the Standing Committee of the CBCI in its revised and published form, leaving out all reference to the centenary of the establishment of "the Indian" hierarchy except for a faint hope of "making the year 1986 memorable", makes the Pope's visit appear entirely his personal matter, a presentation of his "outstanding religious personality with a unique charisma", fulfilment of his office of carrying

the message of Christianity to millions, his advocacy of personal freedom, his concern for justice and the like, totally unconcerned with the actual problems, concerns, aspirations and hopes of the People of God. Even "the deeply spiritual outlook of the Indian people" and "the need for interreligious dialogue" are mentioned by the Bishops in passing only because the Pope has some interest in them.

We wish to submit that this is a very wrong and self-defeating approach to the Papal visit. In many places the Holy Father visited in recent times the papal visit was just a passing event with no lasting impact. Millions came out to see him, a great deal of money was spent for the pomp and ceremony and especially for his security. People were so fascinated by his charismatic personality and dramatic gestures like kissing the ground and fondling the babies, that they simply ignored what he said. One of the significant exceptions was the papal visit to Canada, where Pope John Paul II was perceived as the Pope of Vatican II, presenting a transformist Christology, proclaiming God's design in Christ to transform the historical reality of men and women and to make humanity more authentically human, encouraging all to face problems squarely and to find adequate and acceptable solutions; he came out strongly even in defence of the fishermen who were fighting for their jobs and livelihood against the large corporations that were taking over the fishing industries making use of sophisticated technology. But our fear is that as matters are planned now the Holy Father will come, see none of the problems the Church in India faces, will bless the status quo and leave everything as it is, bringing a little external glamour for the Church as a whole and some political prestige for the Bishops. If this happens the papal visit will be worse than useless from a pastoral point of view.

Our tensions and problems

Pope John Paul II is coming to a country which has been in recent times deeply troubled by many tensions

and problems at all levels, political tensions in many parts of our country like Punjab, Assam and Gujarat, tensions with many of our neighbouring countries, tensions that arise from ethnic and class oppositions and the growing inequality between the very rich and the mass of the poor. We are glad that our Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and his government are effectively tackling these issues and have already diffused many of such tensions. But what is closer to the Church and more relevant to the papal visit are the tensions among the individual churches in India. Unfortunately no real effort is made to face the problem and resolve it with justice. Some seem to equate the legitimate rights of individual churches with fissiparous tendencies connected with caste and language and wish that the problem will go away by itself: An editorial in the *Vidyajyoti* of June-July 1985 complains: "There is the unresolved conflict of the rites: what could be reason for being thankful for the rich variety of Christian traditions alive among us, has become a threat to some, a source of conflict and unrest to all".

But the real problem is that the Latin bishops in India have failed to accept the clear declarations of Vatican II, and it is the particular responsibility of the Pope to see that the rights of the individual Eastern churches in India be safeguarded. The Vatican Council II in its document on the Oriental Churches declared: "Individual churches, whether of the East or of the West...are equally entrusted to the pastoral guidance of the Roman Pontiff, the divinely appointed successor of Peter in supreme governance over the universal church. They are consequently of equal dignity, so that none of them is superior to the others by reason of rite. They enjoy the same rights and are under the same obligations even with respect to preaching the Gospel to the whole world under the guidance of the Roman Pontiff." (*Orient. Eccl.art.* 3) In fact, however, most of India is divided into Latin dioceses and the Orientals are confined to a restricted territory and that too mostly overlapped by Latin dioceses. The Latin bishops have consistently opposed the extension of the Oriental

churches to the whole of India. How can this artificial restriction be reconciled with the Christ-given command to preach the Gospel to the whole world?

As reason for their opposition to the extension of Oriental jurisdiction beyond the present territories the Latin bishops state in a recent submission to the Holy Father: "Because in our missionary situation and socio-political context, unity of proclamation, of witness and culture and paramount values which cannot be ensured under a system of plural jurisdiction". This statement implies several wrong suppositions and reveals a clear misunderstanding of ecclesiastical government itself.

(a) It arbitrarily supposes that the cultural tradition of the Oriental churches is incompatible with the proclamation of the Gospel as conceived by the Latin church in India. (b) It implies that the coexistence and complementarity of different rites in the socio-political contexts of the church universal does not hold good in the Indian church. (c) It wrongly assumes that unity of proclamation and witness is necessarily uniformity of organization and centralization of administration. Experience has shown both in the ecclesiastical and political fields that a certain decentralization of organization and coordination of agencies are more effective means for achieving unity of life and vision among peoples.

More serious is the misunderstanding of the very meaning of ecclesial government implied in the bishops' statement. Ecclesiastical jurisdiction is not mere external organization, institutional administration and application of coercive force. It is essentially and primarily a ministry of salvation through the proclamation of the word of God received from the preaching of the Apostles and handed down through tradition in the course of the history of an individual church in actual communion with the other individual churches. Faith is a living reality that animates the organism of the church which in turn produces appropriate organizations for its self-expression in the various phases and aspects of the life of a people and creates

certain institutions that are symbols, land-marks and focal points that show forth the life of the individual church. This living organism reaches out to people outside to communicate to them the Gospel. This living government of an individual church moving from an internal experience of faith towards its external expression and effective evangelization of those outside in no way contradicts or obstructs the government, or "unity of proclamation" of another individual church. If the organizational set up and institutions of non-Christians like Hindus and Muslims and of non-Catholic Christians existing side by side with those of Catholics do not present any obstacle to evangelization. Latin bishops have to explain why the presence of a sister Catholic Church should constitute a barrier to the effective witnessing of the Gospel. The bishops' line of reasoning is not accepted today even in sociological circles. What constitutes the unity of a nation or even of a large city is not imposition of external organization and centralized government, but rather a criss-crossing network of communities each one of them closely knit together by faith, tradition, culture and other loyalties, interacting and collaborating with other communities. In this way the unity of the church is not in uniformity of administration but in the communion of individual churches that are animated by a common faith received from the Apostles.

Another serious problem in the Indian Church that should particularly call for the attention of Pope John Paul II is the presence of hundreds of thousands of Oriental Christians outside their own restricted territories within the territories of Latin dioceses. Regarding these too Vatican Council II has given clear directives: In the document on the duties of bishops it is clearly stated: For the same reason that clergy are assigned to the pastoral care of the faithful, "where there are faithful of a different rite, the diocesan bishop should provide for their spiritual needs either through priests or parishes of that rite through an episcopal vicar endowed with the necessary faculties. Wherever it is fitting the latter should also have episcopal rank...If for certain reasons, these arrangements

are not feasible in the eyes of the Apostolic See, then a proper hierarchy for the different rites is to be established" (Christ. Dom. art. 23:3). Contrary to the view of the Indian Latin bishops mentioned above, according to Vatican II, multiple jurisdiction of different rites has to be granted when it is needed for the effective pastoral care of people of different rites.

In spite of this clear directive of Vatican Council II the Latin bishops of India with only one or two exceptions have refused to provide for Oriental Christians within their dioceses pastoral care in the proper rite of the faithful. Archbishop Pimenta is perhaps the worst offender in this respect. In his archdiocese of Bombay he has more than hundred thousand Syro-Malabarians spread through several parishes. Though the Syro-Malabar bishops have given him the services of a few priests for the care of these Oriental Christians, Archbishop Pimenta has not given them any pastoral jurisdiction over them; these priests are kept as chaplains to say Mass for them. In places like New Delhi and Madras which have thousands of Syro-Malabarians not even such marginal care in the Oriental rite is granted.

The excuse given by the Latin bishops in their submission to the Holy Father entitled "Latin-Oriental Relations and the Mission of the Church in India" is, that the Syro-Malabarians living outside their proper territory are immigrants and that it is duty of the Latin bishop of the place to ensure "the integration of the immigrants in the local community". But the Syro-Malabarians are genuinely Indians and their culture is the same as that of their fellow Indians anywhere, while Latin Christians in most places have maintained a somewhat foreign flavour in their culture. Hence it is rather ironic for the latin bishops to demand that Syro-Malabar Christians should first be assimilated to the "local community".

Besides, the provisions of the Vatican II document *Christus Dominus* art. 23.3 are not any special concessions

granted by Vatican II to the Orientals and hence are not left to the discretion or good will of the latin bishops. They flow from the fundamental equality of all rites in the church. This basic law of rites belongs to the very constitution of the church, her catholicity and apostolicity, and cannot, therefore, be taken away or violated by any ecclesiastical authority. Whenever and wherever a sizeable group of persons belonging to a particular rite is found, it has the right to demand pastors of its own tradition.

We have a strong suspicion that the intention of the Latin bishops is to absorb the Oriental Christians in their dioceses into the latin rite. In a letter written almost in a hurry by the Latin members of the CBCI standing committee, and sent to the Holy Father on May 10, 1985 they say: "An overemphasis on loyalty to the individual church can be detrimental to evangelization. Faith is more important than ecclesiastical traditions, however venerable or ancient. Historical conditions cannot be ignored and we are called to seek the will of the Lord of history, who through his creative action is present, where evangelization is taking place." This was clearly a move to forestall any concession the Holy Father may grant the Orientals during his visit to India. But any one conversant with Catholic theology cannot but be appalled by the line of reasoning implied in this statement of our bishops. It is a clear denial of the theological meaning of history and of the apostolicity of the church. Faith does not encounter the divine reality apart from and outside of God's self-disclosure in and through human history. So there is no opposition between loyalty to one's individual church which preserves, hands down and communicates the historical experience of the Word Incarnate, and the task of evangelization which only proclaims the Gospel thus received. Gospel is not an abstract doctrine but the living experience of God's word received by one through life in one's concrete situation which is in an individual church, and evangelization is the work of communicating to others that life experience. We are not prisoners of history; but to imagine that we can cut ourselves loose from ou

roots in the Tradition of the church is attempting to found one's own church. The apostolicity of the church means that Christian faith is not simply an abstract system or body of philosophical principles but an experience of the Word of life received by the Apostles and handed down through tradition made concrete in the history of the individual churches.

Father George Guispert-Sauch S. J. of Vidyajyoti, Delhi writing in *Asia Focus* from Hongkong in its issue of March 22, 1985 (p.3) states regarding the rites problem:

"No solution can be realistic that bypasses the facts of history or overlooks the real injustices done to particular churches in the course of mission activity. Painful as this might be, the examination of the actual situation in the light of legitimate rights and ecclesia, tradition is necessary. The church will not be free to commit itself to the task of the kingdom if its internal life does not reflect the values that Jesus stood for such as respect for every individual and group and for their faith."

The problem is, perhaps, much deeper than the lack of good will and generosity from the part of a few Latin bishops, who refuse to recognize the legitimate rights of Oriental Catholics in their dioceses. Though Vatican II has clearly proclaimed the equality of all rites in the Church, in actual practice the Roman Rite is in fact "more equal" than the others. Vatican II itself reaffirms the territoriality principle (*Orient. Eccl.* 7; *Cler. Sanct. can.* 216 2, n. 2; 240 2), according to which the jurisdiction of a church is limited to its territory. It has no right to care for its own faithful scattered throughout the world. This does not affect the Roman Rite, since its head the Pope is also the head of the universal church. Even if the Syro-Malabar church is to obtain a Patriarch or major Archbishop as its head he will have no right to care for the faithful of his rite outside his territory without the intervention of the Holy See. Thus the arbitrary division of India into Latin provinces in 1610 restricting the St. Thomas Christians to the archdiocese of Cranganore was a gross injustice to

the Oriental Church. Though several measures have since been taken to rectify it, it can be fully remedied only if the Oriental jurisdiction is extended to the whole of India. The Archbishop of the Thomas Christians historically had the title of "Metropolitan of all India".

There are several anomalies in canonical legislation that adversely affect the Oriental Catholics. The principle established in the codification of Eastern Canon Law of maintaining as faithfully as possible the canonical norms established by the ancient synods and writings of the Fathers does not permit the Eastern Catholic Churches enough freedom to respond to the actual needs of the times. The very idea of a common code for Orientals forgets the radical diversity of Eastern churches. The unlimited and direct authority of the Pope as supreme Pontiff may be a salutary one; but when instead of reserving to him the supreme power in order to be able to intervene in emergencies, he is actually reduced to one organ of ordinary ecclesiastical administration, the autonomy of the individual church is seriously affected. That all serious decisions affecting the life and worship of the individual church are initiated and concluded in Rome by committees and persons totally unfamiliar with the actual life of the people emasculates the individual church of all originality and initiative. In this respect Catholic Orientals have a serious disadvantage in comparison with non-Catholic oriental churches, which can freely develop and adapt themselves to the exigencies of times and places. In facing these problems one should have in view only the real good of the faithful concerned and their need and right to live and develop according to their genuine heritage and the challenges and demands of the present day context. This is an area where the freedom of the Gospel must be asserted against the restraining power of the law. The Word of God should not be bound.

What we should look for the papal visit

Archbishop Pimenta and all other responsible for the organization of the papal visit have to recognize that

the Pope is not making a pleasure trip for his own sake but coming for the sake of the People of God in India. If this is so first of all the identity of the Indian church as an apostolic church should be recognized. The apostolic origins of the St. Thomas Christians in India have been acknowledged by a number of Fathers of the Church like Ephrem, Gregory Naziansen, Jerome and Ambrose and by great many papal documents. In recent times Pope Pius XII in his radio message to India on December 1, 1952 on the occasion of the 19th centenary of the arrival of St. Thomas the Apostle in India declared: "This apostolic lineage, beloved sons and daughters, is the proud privilege of many among you who glory in the name of St. Thomas Christians and we are happy on this occasion to acknowledge and bear witness to it." (AAS XXXV (1953) pp. 96-67) This emphasis on the apostolic antiquity is not an empty boast nor a pretence for superiority over any one else but the reaffirmation of a sacred trust the Indian church has received for the sake of the universal church, its unique ecclesial tradition.

Since only a small minority of the Indian people are Christian, the papal visit must place the greatest emphasis on the missionary task of the Church. The successor of the Apostle Peter must use his personal authority to see that all the available resources of the Indian church be freed from the artificial barriers imposed on the Eastern churches, and all efforts concentrated on the effective proclamation of the Gospel to all peoples. This is the golden opportunity to unfetter the Gospel and launch an intensive programme for evangelization that will bear its momentum for the next century. In this respect an unrecognized fact is that Kerala with its plentiful priestly and religious vocations supply a good majority of those who work for the evangelization of India. It is only fitting that the Holy Father positively nurtures this flow of spiritual resources from Kerala to the rest of the country so that it continues into the future.

In this missionary perspective we should insist that the papal visit should not smack of any triumphalism but should be a simple celebration of our faith, a celebration of the personal sanctity communicated by Christ. For this the beatification of the servants of God Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara and Sister Alphonsa will be a fitting expression of personal holiness, on which the Indian people places great emphasis. The excuse given by Archbishop Pimenta in this regard really misses the point: "These two are not yet saints, they are still 'venerable servants of God'. The first saint from India is St. Gonsalo Garcia, born in Bassein, Bombay, and martyred in Japan in 1597 for preaching the faith. He was canonised by Pope Pius IX in 1862" (l.c.). Beatification or canonisation does not make any body a saint; it only officially proclaims that such a person has been a saint all along. St. Gonsalo Garcia who died in Japan in the 16th century does not represent our life of holiness today. Christian life of holiness for today's India was shaped and represented by people like Fr. Kuriakose Elias, who inspired the Kerala Christian life in the last century and brought it to its present stage, and Sister Alphonsa who is a model of sanctity for every one living today. Their beatification will be the most fitting celebration of the life of holiness we want to lead today.

Holy Father's visit must encourage us in our actual efforts to make the Indian church a living witness to Christ and should set our priorities for the next decade and more. He must encourage our radical option for the poor in a country in which almost half the population live under the poverty line. He must recognize our God-given task to work for the integral liberation of man with people of other faiths, who form more than ninety seven percent of the seven hundred million people of India. Unfortunately the official teaching of the Church in this field lags far behind actual scholarship. We have to ask ourselves conscientiously what the Papal visit means for the 97% of the Indian people. How do we make it a spiritual event for all the people of India. Why not think of a joint pastoral letter not only of Catholic and non-Catholic prela-

tes but also of the heads of other religions? Above all the Pope must guide us in our efforts to discover the most effective way for proclaiming Christ's unique message for the total transformation of man in proper response to the socio-cultural and religious context of India.

So we are devoting this issue of *Jeevadhara* to explore the Indian context that waits for the papal visit. It examines the actual Indian context for theologizing, the close affinity between the Oriental Christian tradition and the approach to faith of Indian religions like Hinduism and Buddhism. Anto Karokaran discusses the need for an Indian missiology that moves away from the legacy of colonial times and takes the Indian reality in its wholeness. Thomas Kochumuttom presents a comparative study of Christian and Hindu perspectives towards forming a comparative theology in the Indian context. Wayne Teasdale explains an experiential approach to faith that is based on an intercultural epistemology that combines the concerns of modern scientists and of devoted followers of religions of East and West especially of monks.

C. M. I. Provincial House
Trivandrum 695 014

John B. Chethimattam

Indian and Oriental Christian Context of Theologizing

There is one dimension of human thought that unites India with the whole Christian Orient over against the Western pattern of thinking, the belief in the immutability of truth and the eternality of the really Real, in contrast to the Western passion for continuous progress and anxious search for the unreachable. This is particularly clear in the field of religious thinking. This emphasis on the unchanging character of religious truth and the second place accorded to doctrinal development created an impression that Eastern Christians are theologically stagnant, given to narrow pietism, formalism and ritualism in devotion, concerned mostly with the externals of religion. According to Adolf von Harnack, history of dogma came to an end in the East by the seventh century and it never revived. The fact of the matter, however, is that owing to the great many heresies that plagued the early Church consequent upon the application of Greek philosophies to Christian faith, there arose a great deal of scepticism about the suitability of rational analysis for exploring the depths of faith. Besides, the Eastern Christians, especially those far removed from the centres of Western Christendom and the confines of the Roman empire had their own special approach to the areas of faith and religion. In this article I shall discuss the distinctive Indian and Oriental Christian approach to theology in general and to its various specific problems over against the method of Graeco-Roman thinking in these areas. Every generalization tends to be a caricature and an oversimplification of traits. Often it is only a matter of emphasis. But from minor traits and shades the physiognomy of a definite character emerges and the identity of a school of thought is discerned.

1. Scope of theology: apophatism vs "fides quaerens intellectum"

The most outstanding difference of the Indian and Oriental Christian approach to matters of religious faith from that of the West is that the latter undertook it as a rational adventure to analyse and understand what was accepted by faith, while the Orientals started with the basic incomprehensibility of the Transcendent for human reason. St. Augustine started with the motto: "Credo ut intelligam": I believe in order that I may understand. Divine revelation is made not to brute animals but to rational beings and only through reason can they accept it. Full acceptance by reason means that reason understands what it is accepting by faith; what the free will of man presents as good is accepted as truth by the intellect. Creation itself is a self-disclosure of its Creator. Revelation only continues the process and communicates the inner reality of divine life, to which man is invited to be a partaker. Since man is created in the image and likeness of God he can find in his own being certain analogies to give him some idea about the divine reality. Besides, man is enabled by divine grace to move effectively by his own rational activities to grasp God. So theology is the rational and scientific attempt to discover the self-revealing God in his creation, in the inner depths of the human spirit and especially in the mystagogical process initiated by God himself to draw man closer to himself. Such is the scope of theology in the Western perspective. St. Anselm who followed in the footsteps of Augustine defined theology as "fides quaerens intellectum", faith seeking understanding. In the long history of Western theology there has been very little shift in this basic rational and scientific orientation. For it divine reality is something objectively given like any other object. It has to be explored, investigated, systematically examined and respectfully studied.

Eastern thought, on the other hand, started out on the theological adventure with a first look at the puny, incompetent self of the explorer himself, his state of suf-

fering and ignorance. Before the immense and incomprehensible reality of the Divine he felt himself as an absolute nothing, totally irrelevant in the world of all-comprehending infinite Reality. He knew that he could not be anything outside of or additional to the infinite reality of God. Hence any rational attempt that made the Infinite an "object" outside of and in front of the viewing subject implied an initial contradiction that vitiated the investigation itself. So Buddhism abandoned all attempts to establish a metaphysics of God and concentrated on religion as a process to deal with the deep wound of human suffering arising out of desire which had to be prevented by correcting the thinking, activities and mental orientation of man in this state of bondage. Hindu apophatism goes beyond this radical negativism of the Buddhists and makes it a pedagogical device to detach human consciousness from this practical, transitory and really unreal world and directs it to its authentic and original source and ground, the Truth of all truths and the Self of all selves, the infinite, immutable consciousness of Brahman. This process is so subtle and indirect that to one who thinks he knows Brahman that One is really unknown, while to one who thinks he does not know It may be known. Starting from the human side of experience we have to proceed by *neti, neti*, "not so", "not so" excluding from the divine the modes and limitations of all that fall within our conscious experience.

Eastern Christian thought also starts assuming the inadequacy of reason and rational systems to explain the data of divine Revelation. The attempts of early Christian preachers to make Christian faith acceptable to the sophisticated Greeks through the application of Platonism, Stoicism and other philosophies ended in disaster. They raised insoluble problems and brought to the forefront rational theories like Arianism, Apollinarianism, Nestorianism and Monophysitism incompatible with Christian faith. It became impossible to resolve them by purely rational analyses. Over against this attempt to reduce faith to pure philosophy the only reasonable course of action was to test the validity of these man-made rational theories and systems

by the collective witness of the centuries old Christian faith experience. After all, faith is not the conclusion of a syllogism, but illumination by a higher light to grasp what is beyond reason. When Arius argued by logic that the Divine Word could not be God but only a creature the Nicean Fathers argued that if in Jesus Christ human race was really saved and human beings made children of God as faith testified, that saviour had to be really the Son of God; only the Son could make us sons. Against bishop Appollinaris who denied the rational part in Christ's human nature arguing that two free and autonomous rational natures, divine and human, in Christ could not make one single being of the Saviour, those adhering to tradition answered that Jesus Christ could not have fully healed us unless he was also fully human. Nestorius philosophically argued that the Word being God could not have been born of the virgin and died on the cross, and postulated in Christ a human personality as well by the side of the divine. To this line of reasoning the response of the Council of Ephesus was the firm faith of the church in the divine maternity of the Blessed Virgin: If the son of Mary really saved us, he had to be really the divine person of the Logos and she had to be the Mother of God.

In all these and other crucial issues appeal was made from an objective, rational, philosophical analysis and investigation of basic religious problems to the higher court of the simple experience of faith. In this the Judeo-Christian tradition was going back to its Jewish roots: Faith is not a philosophical system but the experience of God who "loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life" (Jn. 3:16). It is not an exposition of the ontology of God but a description of what God said and did for the sake of humanity: "In the past, God spoke to our ancestors many times and many ways through the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us through his Son." (Heb. 1:1-2) Standing before the immense personality of God, the creator, covenant maker, lawgiver and eschatological fulfiller of all things, man realizes that

his own personality as a child of God is a simple zero; all that he is and has, he has received. His personality is total receptivity and also the capacity to surrender himself totally. God himself is that total availability from the Father to the Son and from the Son to the Holy Spirit and to us. He gave his name to Moses as "I am who I am" (Exod. 3:14), not a metaphysical statement of his being but a declaration of his fidelity to his promises. Theology is not, therefore, a metaphysical description of the nature of God but a reflection on the great deeds of God in human history, an anthropology of salvation history in the divine economy for the world.

Oriental Christian apophatism denies the capacity of reason to arrive at an understanding of the reality of faith by mere analogies from experience. By reason we know more what God is not rather than what God actually is. So faith on the level of reason is darkness. What was condemned in the provincial council of Constantinople of 543 in the rejection of Origenism was hellenism itself which tried to explain creation, fall and restoration purely in terms of Platonic philosophy. According to the thinking of Origenist monks God did not "begin" to exercise his goodness; from all eternity he created a succession of worlds unlimited on the intellectual level, since God creates only reasonable and equal beings. Diversification and materialization of minds are the result of free will and fall. Moreover the cyclic conception of time implied an eternal return of worlds towards a single world of "intellects". Against this trend of reasoning maintained by Eunomius and other monks and strongly fostered by the Gnostic mysticism of Evagrius Ponticus, the Greek Fathers including the three Capadoceans and St. John Chrysostom affirmed that the divine essence cannot be known by human reason. It is impossible to say what God is; only what God is not can be known. Any positive definition of God implies his identification with some finite being, and so a known God is necessarily limited.

But this did not lead them to agnosticism, since over against the unknowable divine essence they emphasized the Biblical conception of a living and acting God. Resolving the apparent contradiction between the vision of God promised to the pure of heart (*Mt* 5:8) and St. Paul's assertion that "no one ever saw God" (*I Tim.* 6:16). St. Gregory of Nyssa states: "He who by nature is invisible becomes visible through his energies." Pseudo Dionysius, probably a Syrian ecclesiastic of the sixth century placed the problem squarely on the side of the created mind: "In the same way as things pertaining to the mind cannot be grasped by the senses...according to the same true reasoning all essence is transcended by the super-essential Indefinite."¹ But there is a descending movement on the part of God out of himself, for example, through the temporal mission of the Son in the Incarnation and of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost to make himself approachable and knowable. There is also an ascending movement of beings out of themselves by their desire to participate in the energies of God and to share through grace in the being of God himself: "When we shall become incorruptible and immortal, and when we shall have attained to the state conformable to Christ and the perfectly blessed, we shall be always with the Lord (*I Thess.* 5:17), enjoying fully in very pure contemplations his visible theophany which shall enlighten us with its dazzling rays."²

The scope of theology in Eastern thought is twofold: On the one hand it demonstrates that the knowledge of God cannot be identified with any natural processes of the senses or of the mind, but exceeds them and constitutes an unique mode of knowledge all by itself, which can be termed mystical experience or intellectual intuition. On the other hand, God is present in the universe, not only by his being, omnipresence and power, but personally as our Father, the Risen Lord and as our inspiring Spirit working in the heart of every human beings.

1. Ps. Dionysius. *Divine Names*, 1, 1; P. G. 3, col. 588b

2. *Ibid.* I,4; PG 3, col. 592 bc

2. East syrian tradition: an unique school of theology

There were several theological schools within Christendom. Alexandrian and Byzantine schools profited from Platonic and Neo-Platonic insights. The Arian, Nestorian and Monophysite heresies did, indeed, constitute a set back. These substantial errors required a correction through recourse to the simple traditional faith and the direct and personal approach to the God of the Bible. But once these deviations were corrected theologians strenuously endeavoured to bring the wealth of Greek culture and philosophy to make Christian faith more intelligible and acceptable to the people. The wealth of terminology and insights of the Mystery Cult helped to deepen the experience of Christian mystics. Similarly Roman theologians did not refuse to make use of the Roman juridical genius and penchant for practical organization in efficiently organizing a fast expanding church, especially since the Roman and Byzantine emperors and all their nobles embraced Christian faith. For these Christian rulers of the Roman empire Christianity itself was a pacifying and unifying instrument to keep under control an ethnically and culturally heterogeneous mass of people. So when heresies arose they took the initiative to convoke ecumenical councils of bishops to settle controversies by official definitions and punish those who refused to accept those decisions by deposition from office, banishment and even death. The neat dogmatic definitions did not exhaust the mystery implied in divine revelation; nevertheless they served to indicate what was clearly erroneous and opposed to the data of faith and to put outside the community of believers those who refused to conform to the common profession of faith.

Outside the Roman empire was the school of the East Syrians that started out as the school of Antioch. It followed a literal interpretation of sacred Scripture as opposed to the allegorical and symbolical interpretation of sacred texts adopted by the Alexandrians and Byzantines. In the pragmatic and direct approach to the profession of faith the Antiocheans were closer to Rome than to

Alexandria and Constantinople, but they differed from the Romans by their fidelity to the Hebrew style of theologizing clearly seen in the Old Testament books of the Bible. But when Antioch came under the influence of Constantinople and adopted the Greek style of thinking the theological heritage of Antioch passed on to the East Syrian Church which founded a theological school at Edessa which was later shifted to Nisibis. In the 5th and 6th centuries the East Syrians cut themselves off from the "Western" church of the Greeks and Alexandrians not principally owing to any doctrinal differences but on account of their aversion to the Greek style of theologizing and the growing Byzantinization of the Church.

Historical origins of the Syrian Christian church, though the object of an intense study by scholars in recent decades, have been greatly shrouded in obscurity. Though the foundation of the Edessan church is referred back to 200 A. D., we have regular recording of ecclesiastical events only from the middle of the fourth century. But the ecclesiastical writings by their internal consistency present a definite theological trend clearly distinct from the pattern of thinking of Western schools. Today there is a certain consensus among scholars about the Judeo-Christian origin of the Syrian school of thought. The Qumran and Nag Hammadi finds have provided a solid basis for hypotheses regarding the influence of sectarian Judaism on the evolution of the Christian churches. Gnostic elements and the teachings of Marcion and Mani though generally condemned and rejected as erroneous did not fail to have their positive impact in fixing priorities among Christian values. The Syriac school of theological thinking emerged as a sort of paradox in the midst of the interplay of religious forces in a city on the boundaries of East and West. These Christians considered their Jewish neighbours their bitter enemies and Syriac writings including those of Aphrahat and Ephrem have an intense anti-Jewish polemical tone. Still, theirs was a thoroughly Jewish form of Christianity since they jealously guarded the style of Old Testament thinking as their precious heritage. The apostacy of Marcion in 138 and the birth of Mani in 240 were

historic events that left a lasting mark on their memories on account of the success of Marcionism and Manicheism against Christians. In spite of this deep antagonism, or rather on account of it, the emphasis on the spirit with a certain neglect of the body was one of the fundamental traits they shared with these Gnostic schools. There are certain texts which seem to indicate that in the Syrian church at one time only those who vowed virginity or marital abstinence were admitted to Baptism. Christian life was conceived and presented as the ideal form of human life for all to admire and follow, something out of the ordinary and hence implying a special 'covenant' or pact. All who entered the covenant of Baptism were expected to be modest and decorous, holy and pure. According to the *Doctrine of Addai* those covenanted people dwelt singly and modestly without spot. The *Apology* of pseudo Melito, a work of the third century states: "Those who are mindful of God and belong to that covenant which is immutable see God according to their capacity...As in Noah's Ark, so at the last day the righteous will be preserved."³ Like the Qumran community which often designated itself with the favourite title "*Berit*" or covenant, the early Syrian Christians considered themselves "sons and daughters of the covenant". They felt specially called to present to the corrupt and corrupting world the model of a human community totally dedicated to God's rule. Christianity emerged as a reform group first within Judaism and then within the larger human community itself, to present a model for all to follow. Only by the fourth century was this special role of an elite group assumed by a recognizable body of persons within the church, living a life of celibacy and poverty, some living at home, others in small communities. Only later did they come to be designated as monks and nuns.

Task of Theology as Presenting an Ideal Form of Life: From the beginning theology was caught between two distinct concerns, one to explain to the common man

3. Quoted by R. Murray. *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, A study in Early Syriac Tradition, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1975, p. 14

the minimum requirements for salvation applicable to all, and the other to describe the ideal of perfection, the radical renunciation and total commitment demanded by Christ from his disciples. The early Syrian Church attached importance to the latter, namely to the ideal of radical discipleship set forth in the Gospels. In Indian religions too this was the primary emphasis. Both Buddhism and Jainism started out as rules of life for monks and nuns who got disgusted with the ordinary life led by people around them and wanted to follow a life of total renunciation and spiritual quest. Even Hinduism was basically Brahmanism, the ideal life of the Brahmins who were required by law to abandon certain worldly pursuits and devote themselves to the study and teaching of Scripture, the revealed Word. Early Christian church also upheld the ideal of total renunciation for the sake of Christ. Against the Encratist ascetics and the spiritualistic and dualist religions like that of the Marcionites the church affirmed the sanctity of marriage. According to Aphrahat⁴ marriage is one of the good things God has created, and Ephrem⁵ explains that marriage, family and possessions are lawful by the side of virginity and abstinence in marriage. Still, their main idea is that Christian Baptism is a call to the "holy war"⁶. One has to isolate oneself from kith and kin and all worldly comforts⁷ as a true athlete⁸ and put on Christ the only begotten, "standing up" for him as a sort of representative. For this one must become single-minded by accepting the circumcision of heart, and become integrated to the ecclesial Covenant.

There is a similarity of perspective in the whole East regarding the ideal world that is realized through religion. Socrates in his self-defence before the Athenian jury states the Western view: Ours is not a world of rocks and trees but of moral values. East has gone a step further and declared that ours is a world of divine pre-

4. Aphrahat, *Dem*, xviii, 836-7

5. Ephrem, *Hymns against Heresies*, 46, 6-10; *Hymn on Vrg.* 5:14

6. Deut. 20:1-8; Jos. 5:2; I Cor. 9; Eph. 6

7. Mt. 10:34-39; Lk 12:49-53.

8. I Cor. 9

sence, one in which God is directly present and acting. For Hinduism it is the heavenly Vaikuntha that from time to time comes down to earth under the leadership of God Vishnu who protects the righteous and punishes the wicked and maintains the balance of right and wrong, good and evil. Even for Buddhism which has no Gods the whole world assumes a sacral character from the presence and manifestation of the three bodies of Buddha. But in this Judaism with its idea of the *shekinah* of the Lord in the midst of his people has a signal conception of the divine character of the world and of the Chosen People of the Lord. The deep influence exerted by sectarian Judaism as that of Qumran on Christian communities all over the Near East, created an unified vision of the Old and New Testaments. The same Yahweh who called the people to holy war against the enemies of the Lord is calling us through Jesus Christ to war against flesh, greed and pride of life. The same Lord who was in the midst of the people and in the temple through his *shekinah* is even today in our midst as the Risen Lord. The keynote of the whole Eucharistic celebration is the hymn to the Risen Christ: "You Lord of all we praise, you Jesus Christ we glorify, you are the resurrector of our bodies and you are the liberator of our souls".

The Good News announced by Christianity is that ours is a new world: "The whole creation has been renewed in Christ, who is the head of the new life, and in him the power of death has been dissolved and by his voice he has brought the dead back to life."⁹ Through the resurrection of Christ Paradise itself has come down to earth: "The garden of Joseph from Arimathea became a Paradise; for Christ was placed in it and the saints, angels and seraphim descended there and glorified the Lord saying: Praise to you O Lord...blessed is the one who gladdened us by his resurrection."¹⁰ What is accomplished in the Risen Christ is a new creation parallel to the first creation described in the book of Genesis. Crea-

9. Breviary of Easter Sunday.

10. *Ibid.*

tion blighted by the sin of man is rejuvenated by the glory of the Lord manifested in the resurrection of Christ. This is a theme very close to the heart of the Oriental mind. In the Hindu story of creation Prajapati exhausts himself by projecting the creatures his children and is at the point of death. Then the Gods come together and offer the sacrifice of redemption taking the essence of all things. Thereby Prajapati is rejuvenated and creation itself made new. Creator dying for the sake of his creation in order to save and rejuvenate it is the basic oriental theme of death and life.

But the newness brought by the Risen Christ exceeds the imagination of mythology and the possibilities of humanity. As the Chaldean breviary for Easter sings: "For he made our body a sanctuary... for our race has risen to the exalted height of the incomprehensible divinity... He renewed our image, wiped out our iniquity, called us by his name and subdued everything to us."¹¹ Christian religious vision does not remain purely on the level of nature and reason. Continuing the thought of the Old Testament, Oriental Christian theology affirmed the restoration of God's covenant in Jesus Christ, the reestablishment of God's sovereign rule in human life, realization of the fulfilment of his promise in the outpouring of his Spirit on all, and especially the establishment of a fellowship of persons expanding to us the fellowship of the inner Trinitarian life. This is the reason why East Syrian theologians insisted on the revelation of the Trinity of God as the primary scope of the work of salvation.

3. Concept of salvation

When attention is focussed on what the sovereign rule of God means for each individual in particular there is a rationalization process regarding ends and means. The Hindu vision of the transcendent and creative divine Word became translated into magical charms to ward off diseases, ritual sacrifices to placate the Gods and ascetical practices to control one's karma in order to attain final

11, *Ibid*

liberation from the cycle of births and deaths. In the ordinary day to day practice of religion the ideal of realizing Brahman as the ground of being and the Self of one's own self was easily forgotten. Buddhist monks easily left alone the transcendental aspect of religious experience altogether and concentrated attention on healing the suffering and radical sickness of life through the exercise of right thinking, right behaviour and practice of right concentration of consciousness. Religion lost its divine focus and became very much a purely human process of psychological self-improvement. The transcendental implications of the fullness of emptiness, the eloquence of silence and the illumination of the blowing out of nirvana were too difficult for the ordinary seeker of salvation.

In Christianity too we find a similar rationalization process. When it left the Biblical context of divine revelation and entered the adventure of rationally justifying faith in the light of the dominant philosophies of the times, the main focus became the basic and minimum requirements for the attainment of salvation: What have I to believe and what have I to do to attain salvation? The creeds detailed what one had to believe as a Christian. The Commandments and the precepts described one's obligations. This schematization of the requirements of salvation gave the impresssion that the absolute claims of God and religion could be satisfied on a part time basis. It also raised endless philosophical questions about the exact meaning of the statements of the creed. Though the definitions of councils could point out what were obviously wrong regarding the positive meaning of divine revelation they could give only general indications. The limited perspective of the questioners and questions restricted also the answers. In the context of the Bible salvation was conceived very much as a matter of the personal relation between God the father and his children, the human beings; his gracious forgiveness of their sins and their return to friendship with him were the main concerns. But in the world of Greek philosophy it was conceived as the work of bridging the immense gap between the one absolute

God, pure Spirit and man immersed in the material world. Man is in a state of alienation and Jesus Christ is the one mediator that brings him closer to God. What should be the appropriate nature of this mediator was the main question discussed in all the Christological controversies of the early church. The answer to this question was that Christ had to be truly the Son of God, of the same nature as that of the Father. He assumed a perfect human nature. In order to pay the debt of our fallen state, the inviolable nature was united to one subject to suffering so that, as was fitting to heal our wounds, one and the same "mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5) could die in one nature and not in the other."¹² In short, Christ is the saviour of humanity because he expiates their sins and reconciles them to the Father and communicates to them the fruits of redemption through the Sacraments he himself instituted. So by keeping the commandments and frequenting the Sacraments one can attain salvation.

The great advantage of the East Syrian Church was that far removed from the philosophical thinking of the Greek world, it was very little involved in the Trinitarian and Christological controversies which centered around the unique mediatorship of Christ. So it consistently maintained the Biblical context of salvation: salvation was not simply an act of mediation placating an angry God, but first and foremost the great deed of Yahweh the Father who loved the world so much as to give his only begotten Son for its salvation. This saving act of Yahweh was foreshadowed in the creation of the world liberating it from the primeval chaos, in the liberation of Israel from the Egyptian and Babylonian captivities. Every event of the Bible in a way narrated a saving act of God repeating and applying what he did in the beginning. Similarly in the redemptive death of Christ on the cross are fulfilled the foreshadowings of human salvation in the myriad events of the Bible. As the Ramsa (evening prayer) of the Chaldean breviary

of Holy Saturday narrates, the sin of Adam found its adequate response in the suffering of the Son as a sinner in the hands of the Jews. The death of Abel at the hands of his brother finds its parallel in the death of the Redeemer at the hands of sinful men, and Noah was "substitute to the world" like the Son of the Most High hanging on the wood. As Sem and Yapheth covered the nakedness of their father, sun and moon put on sorrowful darkness to hide the Lord on the Cross. Melchisedek offering bread and wine for a sacrifice, Abraham offering the ram caught in a bush in the place of his son, Jacob seeing the ladder of angels at Bethel, Joseph spat upon by his brothers (Gen. 37:20), Job to whom the Lord was revealed from afar (Job 38:1) and even Naphthak who sacrificed his only daughter (Judg. 11:30) are all viewed as manifestations of the same salvific will of the Father finally fulfilled in the sacrifice of the Son on Calvary. Moses, the first of the prophets, Samuel the high priest, David the psalmist and Solomon the ocean of wisdom, and all the prophets like Isaias, Hosea, Joel, Abdias, Micheas, Zacharias and Jeremiah go before Christ proclaiming the redemptive mystery which was fully expressed only in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the East Syrian perspective every religious service and liturgical celebration including the Holy Eucharist is a "memorial", a recalling and applying of the saving act of Yahweh, the Creator and Saviour finally realized in the Christ event.

In Western theology often a distinction is made between the person and the work of Christ, his real humanity, real divinity and the divine personality of the Logos on the one hand and what he actually did for the sake of humanity on the other. Schools are sharply divided on the reason for the incarnation of the Son of God, whether the divine Logos would have taken human flesh if there were no human sin to expiate. A number of theories have been proposed explaining how Christ satisfied for human sin, such as the infinite malice of sin to which only the Son of God could offer adequate satisfaction, the penal substitution of the innocent Son in the place of sinners and even

a certain bribing of the devil out of his rights over men. Such theories often evince a misunderstanding of the Biblical concepts of justice, reconciliation, redemption, sacrifice and the like taking them totally out of the Hebrew context in which they were originally proposed and interpreting them with the Graeco-Roman juridical and philosophical suppositions. In this perspective salvation is viewed as a purely human affair completely centred in man, according to the human requirements of justice and satisfaction.

On the other hand, in the Biblical and East Syrian perspective just as creation itself salvation also is first and foremost a self-disclosure of God. Human sin in no way thwarts the original design of the creator, but only becomes an added opportunity to manifest the inner reality of the Godhead full of compassion and love for the creatures. The work of salvation was from the part of God first and foremost a self-disclosure of the mystery of the Trinity, Father eternally generating the Son and sending him on the temporal mission of the Incarnation so that we can participate in his sonship, and the Son giving us his members his own eternal Spirit. Human sin and malice revealed how much God loved his creation and how generously gave us his only begotten and poured out his love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. After all human sin is a rational phenomenon, lack of knowledge and love, and salvation too has to be an expansion of love: "Eternal life means knowing you, the only true God, and knowing Jesus Christ, whom you sent." (Jn 17:3)

On this point Eastern religious thought is strongly supportive of the East Syrian perspective: sin is ignorance and bondage to passions, and salvation is illumination and liberation. According to Hinduism human bondage is basically a lack of realization of one's true self in God, leading to passion and attachment to terrestrial things. For Buddhism also the chain of births and deaths starts with ignorance leading to craving for worldly things, their experience and consequent suffering. Jainism also placed the root of human bondage in a hiding of the inner light of

infinite knowledge and power and the process of liberation is pulling down the walls created by human ignorance and passion.

Under the strong impact of the Qumran community that placed great emphasis on illumination and understanding and of the Gnostic groups as that of the Manichees, the East Syrians attached great importance to the true knowledge of God. The greatest sin was idolatry, mistaking a creature for the Creator, and every sin was a certain lack of recognition of the glory of the Lord: "Sin of Adam brought darkness, misery and death,...Christ brought light and truth to all", says the Chaldean breviary for the season of the Apostles¹³. Christ who came to destroy the sin of Adam calls us towards the light of knowledge of his Godhead¹⁴. Hence the specific goal of the Incarnation is to lead us through an experience of the humanity of Jesus Christ to an experience of the divinity and knowledge of the three divine persons.

4. Unique approach to the divine reality

The most crucial question in theology is how the incomprehensible and infinite divine reality can be approached by man. Any approach that attempts to postulate an infinite God outside of and additional to man and his world of immediate experience is full of metaphysical contradictions. The most fundamental weakness of Western philosophy in its approach to God is that it treats divine reality as an object over against the human subject. According to Nietzsche objectivism is the original sin for which the West is condemned to cultural sterility. Eastern philosophy in general has always held that God can never be attained as an object. As the Kena Upanishad affirms, just as the Divine cannot be attained by sense experience, Scripture and tradition, so also is it unreachable by reason. It can be attained only through Wisdom in meditation. Most Hindu philosophers including Sankara and Ramanuja agree that the transcendent infinite reality

13 Brev. of 3rd Sunday of Slihe

14. *Ibid.*

cannot be attained through generalizations from experience. Just as one's own self, the Self of all selves also can be attained only indirectly as the ground of all things, that source from which the origin, sustenance and dissolution of all things and the fountainhead of Scripture itself.

The consistent view of East Syrian thinkers is that the main purpose of the Incarnation of the Son of God is to impart to humanity a true knowledge of God, to reveal the Trinity of persons in God. As St. John says, "That which has existed from the very beginning, which we have heard, which we saw with our eyes, which we saw and touched with our fingers, about that word of life we write to you." (1 Jn 1:1-2) "No one has ever seen God. The only Son, who is the same as God and is at the Father's side, he has made him known." (Jn 1:18) Speaking from the side of faith our only authentic experience of God is through the human nature of Christ, who suffered and died for our sake and through his resurrection achieved our salvation. Right from the time of Theodore of Mopsuestia, Antiochene and East Syrian thinking was caught between two obvious supernatural facts: On the one hand, divinity could not suffer, and on the other, the suffering of a mere man could not achieve the salvation of humanity. The direct conclusion from holding these two facts together was that the personal and pre-existent identity of the eternal Logos had appropriated the flesh becoming fully man, and that Christ's single hypostasis was not a 'hypostasis of union' newly appeared at the moment of the incarnation, but the very hypostasis of the Logos. The pre-existent Word is the *subject* of the death of Christ, for in Christ there is no other personal subject apart from the Word; only *some one* can die, not something, or nature, or the flesh¹⁵. The experiential knowledge of the Son in the flesh led to the knowledge of the Father and to receptivity to the activity of the Spirit of the Son. Only later under the influence of Nestorianism did Babai

15. John Meyendorff. *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, St. Vladimir Sem. Press, 1975, p. 72.

and others affirm a sharp division between the concrete divine *knoma* of the Logos and the human *knoma* of Jesus united only by a 'personality of union' like the union between a man and his image in the mirror.

Equally experiential is the approach to the Spirit. In Hinduism the supreme divinity of Brahman is experienced as the *Atman*, the divine inner controller residing in the heart of every being. In Christian thought also the Son makes his body one by giving his own Spirit to be the animating principle of all his members. The presence and work of the Spirit unites the various events in the salvation history of humanity. The same Spirit of God that brooded over the waters in creation, raised also the dead body of Christ back to life in the Resurrection; makes the baptismal waters regenerative of Christians; transforms bread and wine into Christ's body and blood in the Eucharist; and makes the Church with all its human members the living body of Christ. As the breviary hymn for the Sunday of Pentecost says: "The Holy Spirit by his gifts enters into and accomplishes everything. He inspires prophecy, fills the priesthood with his grace, and he can give wisdom to the simple. For he revealed to fishermen the mystery of the Godhead, and he by his power holds together all the wonderful orders of the church. He is one in nature and owner of the glorious throne with the Father and his only begotten Son."¹⁶

5. Church an assembly or institution ?

An area of sharp contrast today between East and West is the conception of the sacral community of believers. In the early Church and through the greater part of the first millennium both in the East and in the West the church was the assembly of the disciples of Christ. This community of God is a brotherhood in which the power structures of the world are broken down, (see Mt. 20:25f; Lk 22:25; Mk 10:42 f), and all are equal with only functional differences in ministry with regard to specific services especially leadership. It was an 'apostolic' community in

16. Breviary for Pentacost.

the sense that it transmitted faith in the kerygmatic form referring always back to the apostles who were the immediate witnesses of Christ. It was a community of God through being a community of Jesus. The community stood under the apostolic norm of discipleship of Jesus, to be realized again and again in new historical circumstances. Proclamation of the word, worship, and service of the poor were characteristic marks of the community, and just as it had the right to celebrate the Eucharistic Sacrifice it had also the right for the service of a minister or ministers. Such apostolic communities were bound together in love under the leadership of the bishops whose ministry was a gift of the Holy Spirit. The bishop was the symbol and representative of the apostolic transmission of the kerygma and of leadership handed down through legitimate succession. The minister and his service were an integral part of the life of the community to such an extent, that the Council of Chalcedon (451) decreed that no one could be validly ordained a priest or a deacon unless a local community were clearly assigned to him.

But in the West this character of the church as the assembly of the People of God radically changed with the emergence of powerful Christian kings and emperors and their Caesaropapism that made their bishops and priests their pawns. *Ecclesia* was no longer a living community but simply a status symbol of secular rulers with private churches. The involvement of the church in feudalism made the bishops princes under the over-all authority of emperors. Several reform movements to free the church from the meddling of temporal rulers as the one under Pope Gregory VII failed to curb the trend.

The renaissance of the Roman Law at the turn of the 12th century gave a juridical justification for detaching the power of leadership completely from the people and superimposing on the church the pyramidal administrative structure of the ancient Roman government. Especially under Pope Innocent III (1198-1216) the old Roman principle of *oikonomia* was adapted to become the principle of dispensation. The old relationship between *ecclesia* and

ministerium, church and spiritual service, was replaced by *potestas* and *eucharistia*, power to consecrate the Eucharist: Whereas in the ancient church one was ordained to preside over the church community, now through ordination one was given the power to change bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. In the early church the community itself was the active subject of offering the Eucharist. Now it became the exclusive privilege of the ordained priest, and the people participated in it only indirectly through the mediation of the priest. Precisely at this time in history one began for the first time to speak of a mysterious sacramental character impressed on the soul through ordination and it became the basis of the whole sacrament of order¹⁷.

The works of pseudo Dionysius, who was mistaken for St. Dionysius the Areopagite of the first century and had an authority in medieval Europe equal to that of St. Augustine, seemed to have greatly influenced the development of ecclesiology in the West in the scholastic and post-scholastic period. According to ps. Dionysius there are two distinct modes of union with God, one theology, mystical, individual and direct; the other theurgy, the activity of the hierarchy and its numerous intermediaries. Theology belonged to the realm of personal holiness, while theurgy embraced not only the ecclesiastical institution but also in true neo-Platonic fashion the transmission of a gnosis of which the sacraments administered by the priesthood were the symbols¹⁸.

But in the East this Western trend in ecclesiology did not make any appreciable impact owing to the absence of the political and juridical forces that ruled the West. Even ps. Dionysius was counteracted by the spiritual tradition linked with Evagrius Ponticus. In fact Nicetas Stethatos, a commentator of Dionysius in the eleventh century arrived at a conclusion diametrically opposite to the

17. Edward Schillebeeckx. *Ministry, Leadership in the Community of Jesus Christ*, New York: Crossroad, 1981. pp. 52-58.

18. J. Meyendorff. *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, pp. 108-109.

absolutization of ecclesiastical hierarchy. According to him the real 'bishop' was the one who has knowledge and is capable of initiating people into it, not one who has been ordained by man. But this Evagrian extremism was overcome by theologians like Maximus and Gregory Palamas who returned to the christocentric conception of grace of the sacraments and of human synergy.

In the whole East the emphasis was entirely on the sacred assembly of believers gathered around the Word of God. Though for the ordinary believer ritual priesthood and social hierarchy have a fascination as the focus of religion, for the more discerning members of the Hindu religious community more important are the personal experience of the divine and the sharing of that experience with fellow believers. The guidance by teachers, performance of ritual and the like are only means. The most important principle is the *adhikāra* or psychological competence and need of the individual believer concerned. In Buddhism also the *samgha* or community of believers does not represent any institutional structure or hierarchical power, but simply designates the various grades and stages in the spiritual progress in which the more advanced can only help the weak to go ahead on their own.

In the East Syrian perspective church is not conceived as a mere society or even an institute of salvation to provide effective means of salvation for those who want to make use of its services, but as paradise on earth, the proleptic presence of the heavenly kingdom in the midst of God's people on earth. The body of Christ received in the Eucharist by a sort of fusion with their bodies makes Christians the real body of Christ. Just as Christ's body is present in all the consecrated hosts in the world and yet remains one, whole and entire, so is Christ distributed in the Christians. Commenting on the Psitta version of Is. 53:12: 'I will divide him among many nations', Aphrahat explains it in terms of the multiplication of the one Christ in his members, and St. Ephrem adds an

Eucharistic sense to it": "That is among the many who eat his body and drink his blood."

But in this perspective on the Church and ecclesiastical hierarchy the Syro-Malabar church ruled by Latin prelates for more than three centuries and after that by bishops trained in Latin seminaries, has unfortunately inherited an ecclesiology which is purely Western. Syro-Malabar bishops are more Roman than the Romans in their bureaucratic approach to church government and of a predominantly juridical outlook in spiritual matters. A radical change in their ecclesiology is needed if they have to be faithful to the tradition they have received from St. Thomas the Apostle and if they must respond to the attitudes and expectations of the Indian people.

6. Worship and liturgy

One area where the Indian and East Syrian attitudes present a certain anomaly in their normally spontaneous approach to life and reality is that of worship and liturgy. Indian people are very devout by tradition and their life is inspired and sustained by prayer and constant meditation on God. They find these spontaneous acts of worship an integral part of their life. As for formal worship the Vedic Hindus offered sacrifices to the Gods in fire both at home and in public gatherings. Fire was both a deity as well as priest-mediator between Gods and men, carrying people's offerings to the Gods and bringing their blessings back to men. But when in the Middle Ages Hinduism took over the pre-Aryan forms of worship, ritual worship became something cut off from ordinary life, reserved to a class of priests. The Deity is kept in the inner sanctuary of temples, which are accessible only to the priest. Temple itself is not a place of assembly but an object of worship. Ordinary people have to approach the Deity through the mediation of the priest.

In Christianity there is no sharp division between private prayer and official liturgical worship. Even personal prayer, as it is inspired by the Spirit of God is a worship of the whole body of Christ. Formal liturgical

worship is centered in the Eucharist and the Sacraments which actualize the redemptive work of Christ in his death and resurrection, and celebrate the continued presence of the Risen Lord in the midst of the people as the one mediator between God and men. Though liturgy is essentially the worship of God, it is performed in Christian worship through the concrete encounter with the Risen Christ who leads us to the Father and communicates to us his own Spirit.

But there came about a certain radical change in this liturgical orientation towards the fifth century in the East and in the 10th century in the West. The focus in liturgy was shifted from the encounter with Jesus, the Risen Lord to an adoration of his divinity and of the whole Trinity of God. There were several reasons for this shift. The solemn Jewish worship with its focus in the presence of Yahweh in the Holy of Holies of the Jerusalem temple held a strange fascination for Christians who did not forget their Jewish past. So when the dignity and social standing of the Christian community was boosted by the conversion of Constantine to Christianity and the proclamation of the freedom of Christians they naturally tended to restore the solemnity of ancient worship. The lack of space in the Cave of Christ's tomb in Jerusalem, which became the central place of worship for Christians was another practical reason: The bishop and the clergy celebrated the Eucharist in the secrecy of the cave away from the gaze of the common people who had to wait outside. This easily became the model and rule for worship elsewhere too.

Arian controversy which focussed attention on the divinity of Christ was an immediate cause for shifting the emphasis from the humanity of Christ to his divinity. As Joseph A. Jungmann S. J. says, "From that time on there was a constantly widening gap between Christ and Grace. In repelling Arianism the tendency was to emphasize Christ's divinity so much that there was a danger of presenting Him not as a bringer of salvation, but more or less as the appearance of God in the world — here to receive

our adoration and perhaps to teach us by word and example."¹⁹ The Sacraments were dissociated from their living source, Christ, and made into puzzling conditions for pleasing God. The continued existence of Christ in his glorified humanity gradually disappeared from Christian piety. Instead the earthly Christ, his life, suffering and death by which he atoned for our sins came to be stressed. The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed that lays the greatest stress in the inner structure of the Trinitarian mystery was introduced into the Holy Liturgy.

The laity were progressively removed from direct participation in the Eucharistic celebration. As Louis Bouyer says: "In Christian antiquity even if the bishop or the priest alone said the eucharistic prayer, all the Christians, clergy and laity, praying with him in the same position... were perfectly aware of the fact that what he said was said in the name of all."²⁰ But the removal of the clergy outside the community to an apse, even separated by a veil or a solid screen created the impression that the clergy celebrated the liturgy for the faithful and even instead of them but not with them. "The church performs her Mysteries in secret away from those that are without and the priest celebrates privately within the sanctuary", says Narsai²¹. Another alienating factor described by Dom Gregory Dix is the suppression of the offering of bread and wine by the faithful, which was a weekly rule. With the exaggerated emphasis on the divine presence in the Eucharist and new devotional sentiment of fear and awe of the consecrated Sacrament the laity became infrequent communicants, and *offerentes* or *prospferonte* only in name. "The introduction of the devotional novelty of a special 'holy loaf' made by clerical hands as alone suffi-

19. J. A. Jungmann S. J. *Good News and Its Proclamation*, Manila, pp: 10-11

20. *Liturgy and Architecture* (Notre Dame, Ind. University of Notre Dame Press, 1967) p. 59

1. Narsai, *Homily XVII*, 1

ciently holy for sacramental consecration further robbed the survival of the lay oblation of bread and wine (in so far as it did survive) of significance.''²²

One who provided a doctrinal basis for this clericalization and decadence of the liturgy was Pseudo Dionysius. Though the East did not accept his theory of hierarchies in the conception of ecclesiastical administration as the West did, it blindly followed it in the interpretation of the liturgy with a view to dealing with the mass of nominal Christians that thronged the churches in the fifth century. Though Dionysius employed to designate the Eucharist the traditional term *synaxis*, which implied an assembly of the faithful and a community action, by insisting on the quasi divine status of the initiating triad in the hierarchy - bishops, priests and deacons - he gave the liturgy the impression of an esoteric initiation, an idea borrowed, of course, from the neo-Platonists and the *Corpus Hermeticum*. Only by ascending the steps of the hierarchy by way of initiation does one reach the mystery that remains always essentially hidden. This distorts the basic understanding of the liturgy as a celebration of the People of God gathered around the Risen Lord. Caught within the structure of the hierarchies the relationship between God and man came to be conceived in a purely individualistic manner, completely determined by the intermediaries. Priesthood was defined not as an element of the inner structure of the People of God, but a personal state²³. The corporate, Christological and eschatological sense of the liturgy was thrown into obscurity.

The liturgical movement of the past hundred years has greatly remedied this distortion of perspective in the Western church. But the Eastern church still caught in the external glamour of solemn liturgical services is even now living with the liturgical decadence owing to the ignorance of the masses and especially to the blind and uncritical attachment to tradition.

22. Dom Gregory Dix. *Shape of the Liturgy* (New York: Seabury Press, 1982) p. 436

23. John Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, pp.104-111

7. Outlook for the future

In the orientation to the future too there is a sharp distinction between East and West. West is constantly looking for new ways of establishing God's heavenly kingdom on earth, taking into account the various coordinates of human life, while the East seeking to understand more deeply the divine *shekinah*, the God who is already present in his creation. In this perspective Vatican II was a truly Western council. Ever since the 16th century when the Protestants left the church and its tradition opting for the Bible as the sole criterion for salvific truth, the Western church was very much preoccupied with its own self-image and authority, its worship, its preaching and missionary work, relationship with other churches and other religions, its role in the modern world and the like. These were the main themes of Vatican II. The central themes of the Bible — God and Christ — were somewhat forgotten. Today Western people are looking forward to a Vatican III to define the remaining coordinates of God's kingdom on earth, the psychological, sociological, economic, political and cultural aspects of human life and church life.

These were never the preoccupations of the people of the East. In fact Eastern religions like Hinduism and Buddhism grossly neglected the earthly concerns of man allowing large masses to wallow in abject poverty, hunger and misery while searching for the soul of man. Their idea was that if human consciousness were fully centred in God and God's appearance in the world through avatars and incarnations, then man would subsequently see that his body, society and the material conditions conformed to the nobility of the spirit. As Sri Aurobindo Ghosh has said, India and the East cannot be brought to modernity by external reform and modifications of details. They have to be moved from their deepest centre.

To the East Syrians the central Christian idea was that a Christian is called to an angelic life. The *qyama* or covenant of baptism literally meant the act of standing, implying both the self-commitment at baptism as well as

union with the ceaseless worship of heavenly 'watchers' or angels. It also indicated the readiness to wage war against the evil spirits, and man's base passions. So fasting and penance came to have a great importance in Eastern Christianity just as in Eastern religions in general and in Islam. St. Ephrem who wrote several hymns on fasting called it "the battle declared for the athletes of faith". Fast is a strong leader assisted by whom those who so desire become invincible soldiers of God and possess in themselves temples inhabited by the Holy Spirit²⁴. Through it the sinful resistance of the mind is conquered and our hearts are raised to God²⁵. Fasting which is a certain declaration of independence from material food was considered also a profession of faith in the resurrection.

This gathering up of our dissipated energies is to establish an ever new and deeper relationship with God who is always present in the midst of his people. The transcendent Godhead is also the inner Self. Christ has brought us a deeper intimacy with the Father than was ever possible in the Old Testament or in other religions; He raised us to his own level of sonship, since he communicated to us his own personal relationship to the Father and encouraged us to call him "Abba". It also brings a new relationship to our fellow human beings: According to Eastern thought other people are not isolated entities but manifestations and representatives of our own deeper self, God. So closely allied to fasting are works of mercy, by which we "send up to heaven through the needy those goods which we love and esteem much, with the confidence that we shall without end enjoy and delight in them"²⁶. To illustrate this the Syriac writers adduce the legendary example of St. Thomas the Apostle who after promising the Indian king to build a palace for him, distributed the money among the poor and through that action built a palace for him in heaven as was testified by the king's deceased brother.

This deep relationship with God, Christ and other

24. *Hymns on Fasting* XII I.

25. *Ibid.* I,6:7; II, 2

26. Ebed Jesu. *Ksava d Marganitha*

human beings calls for a radical departure from the morality of nature and reason as being totally inadequate. Since we are called upon to share in divine life and the fellowship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, a cosmetic adjustment of our relationship with the human coordinates is not enough. Ours is not a merely moral world as Plato and Greek philosophy stated. Ours is a Godly world, in which we relate to other fellow beings in and through our experience of God.

Conclusion

What I have explained above is to show that the whole Orient, Christian as well as non-Christian has a deep unity in culture and tradition and in religious outlook. In history and tradition and in the general approach to problems the Oriental churches and Indian religions have followed a common path. In the understanding of salvation, approaches to the Godhead, conception of the community of the faithful as an assembly united in God rather than a mere institution, and the very understanding of the scope of theologizing there is basic unity between them. Even in the history and expressions of worship of God they have suffered similar vicissitudes and face similar challenges.

But this is not to assert or imply any superiority of the East over the West. We simply point out the radical difference in outlook between East and West. Even in our present day movement towards the formation of a common world the unique contribution the East has to make should not be ignored. The Oriental traditions of the St. Thomas Christians in India, both Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara, are no anomaly. Treating the Indian church as a monolith even as a province of the Roman church ignoring the unique traditions of the St. Thomas Christians will be a serious mistake. The universal church itself will be the loser. The Oriental Christians in India on their part have a special God-given responsibility to communicate to their fellow Indians Christ's message of salvation proclaimed for all human beings.

John B. Chethimattam

A Missiology for India

01 The Indian Church has a history dating from the preaching of the Apostle Thomas in the first century A. D. Down the centuries it was closely associated with the Chaldean church which was characterised as a "Church on Fire" since it sent its missionaries far and wide even into the confines of the Chinese empire in the far East. But the Church in India planted in the higher echelons of society became almost a caste with a definite and immutable position among castes. Since movement from one caste to another was prohibited and since everyone's caste was fixed by birth conversion to Christianity from other religions, especially Hinduism, was almost impossible. A change to this static and stagnant situation was introduced by the coming of the Portuguese towards the turn of the sixteenth century. They brought along with them Christian missionaries, whose task was to spread Christ's kingdom just as the adventurous sailors tried to find new lands to conquer for their earthly king. But this missionary explosion of the sixteenth century was characterised by the political outlook of the times and placed the emphasis on proselytization of individuals and annexation of new lands to Christendom.

02 Only in recent times has the Church started to reflect seriously on the meaning and method of mission work. In this reflection in the Indian context we have two distinct methods of evangelization to compare. One is the ancient East Syrian approach that was fundamentally the communication of living faith from a believing community to form and develop another community of living faith. The other is the method created by the particular political outlook of Western colonial powers. It naturally placed the emphasis on conquest of individuals and groups and tried to extend the reign of the heavenly Sovereign and establish his kingdom. In this paper I shall first explain

the basis and goal of mission in general, then examine the Indian reality to which the message of the Gospel is addressed and then present the necessity of a holistic missionary approach moving away from the legacies left by the colonial times.

1. Basis and goal of mission in general

1.1 The basis and goal of the mission of the church is derived from God's intervention in history, the divine *Kenosis*, the divine Incarnation or the Paschal Mystery. What do these theological expressions and insights of the Christian experience of God mean? They mean fundamentally two things. First a communication or witness of God by Jesus Christ through *Identification* and *Solidarity* with man in history; secondly, a communion or community effected through and resulting from the Self-emptying (Paschal Mystery) involved in the *witness of identification*.

1.1.1 Let us take the first point: a communication or witness of God by Jesus Christ through identification and solidarity with man in history. St. John says in his Gospel: "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us". The expression 'Flesh' does not simply mean the raw flesh. It primarily means Christ's identification with man in all the details of his existence, in all its stark and naked reality: his freedom and creativity, his culture, value system, his aspirations and struggles, his failures and victories all put together without exception. The Christian consciousness from the very beginning unequivocally insisted on this aspect of the divine Incarnation in the words of Credo: 'Born of the Virgin Mary, suffered, died and buried.' Why did Credo, very sparing in words, include an apparently inconsequential phrase 'buried', if not to express the full extent of Christ's identification with us in history?

Christ's witness through identification has this speciality, that of medium becoming the message, where the history of man is not merely an external context, but also part of the very text and content of divine Incarnation.

As a result, it is no more God speaking through signs and other intermediaries, but a direct speaking which can be done only through identification with the concrete man. And man did not fail to understand the difference of such a divine disclosure when he confessed in these words: "Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. We have seen His Glory as of the only begotten Son of God, full of Grace and Truth."

1.1.2. We come now to the second aspect of the divine Incarnation which flows from the first: a communion or community resulting from the witness of God through identification:

God's intervention in history, the divine Incarnation is in fact the Paschal Mystery or the Self-emptying of God in history as described by Paul in Phil. 2:5-11, "He took the form of a slave, was obedient even to death on a cross".

Was the purpose of Christ's death merely in expiation of the human sin in a juridical sense and the accumulation of divine merits stored up for men of all times, and the purpose of the church to distribute and administer these merits through sacraments. If it is only so understood, we lose much of the essential meaning of the Paschal Mystery and the mission of the Church. The Kenosis of God in history, the Paschal Mystery is an expression of the inner life of the triune God. God is a community of Self-giving other-centred persons: the Father giving himself wholly to the Son and the Son giving himself wholly back to the Father and the Holy Spirit who is the bond of their union. There is self-giving, and other-centredness in God which is the essence of the inner life of God and this is an insight of the Christian experience of God.

The divine Incarnation is an expression of the other-centredness of God in history. God the Father gives himself fully to man in Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ through obedience learnt through 'many tears and suffering' begun at Incarnation, continued through an utter dispossession of himself by becoming a slave and identifying himself with man, consummated in the death on the cross, and thus

gives himself fully back to the Father. Such self-giving and other-centredness lead to communion and community in God and its expression in history, the Paschal Mystery. The Incarnation calls into existence the Christian fellowship.

Man created in the image of God, bears in himself the imprint of the other-centredness of God with a necessary and fulfilling urge for an I-Thou relationship; but through sin man has become a closed system unable to enter into a blossoming communion. Through knowledge, experience and participation of the Paschal Mystery, the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, man is regenerated in the image of God and consequently impelled and enabled to an other-centred communion with God and fellow beings. This is the content of the Christian Gospel and fellowship.

1.1.3. The basis of the Christian mission and fellowship is the experience of God in Jesus Christ, communicated through his witness by identification and the Paschal Mystery. The specific content of the Christian revelation and witness is, therefore, neither the experience of God in the heart of nature or heart of man in general. It is neither the ontic or unknown Christ of religions, but "That which we have seen and heard" (1 John 1:3), the Paschal Mystery. Such an experience can never be delinked from fellowship: "So that you have fellowship with us" (1 John 1:3). The mission of the Church is not merely to distribute the stored up merits of Jesus Christ, but invite men and women to an experience of the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ who is our sanctification.

1.1.3.1. Neither the unknown Christ of other religions according to Panikkar nor the experience of God in the anonymous Christianity of K. Rahner can empty the Christian mission and witness of its specific inner content and movement towards the entire humanity for community building in Jesus Christ. No amount of interreligious dialogue or humanization efforts can be a substitute for the Christian mission and witness, if it does not include and insist upon the specific content of the Christian experience, which is

an experience of God in Jesus Christ conveyed through a witness of identification and paschal experience resulting in communion and community.

2. Mission of the church in India

The Mission of the church in India is the self same mission of Jesus Christ but realized in the concrete situations of India. Therefore, it should be carried out by a witness through identification with the Indian reality involving self-emptying and resulting in communion and community. If the mission and witness of the Church in India do not have the essential characteristics of Christ's identification and self-emptying, it cannot convey the specificity of the God-experience transmitted in the historical revelation and consequently it has no chance or right to exist.

2.1. What is the Indian reality to which the church has to bear witness through identification involving self-emptying: it consists of the living religions of our land with their profound God-experience and the teeming millions of the suffering and struggling masses.

2.1.1. Let us first of all take the living religions of India. What does our identification with them mean? In the first instance, dropping of our negative attitude to them inherited from the early missionaries who identified God and salvation with the institutional church and believed other religions to be a work of Satan.

It is also not enough to have an attitude of mere partial appreciation, as in the case of some progressive missionaries of the early missions, who were magnanimous enough to concede to other religions certain partial truths, but never a valid God-experience bringing salvation.

For a witness of identification, what we need is an acknowledgement with Vat. II, of the fact that other religions contain valid God-experience and have fulfilled and still fulfil a positive role. This acknowledgement is not an extra honour we do them, but a duty we owe them and a debt we pay them back.

But this acknowledgement is only a first step towards an identification with them. What are the Indian religions, the Indian art and music and the Indian genius except God's gift to us? We have to accept them gratefully as a part and root of our existence on which to build up and thus possess a wholeness of life. But then how? Through a process of open and reverential and loving dialogue.

In Micah, 4:1-4, there is a vision of Jerusalem into which all the peoples of earth come bearing their riches. We know that it is a prophecy concerning the Church, which is the real Jerusalem to which all the peoples of the earth flock. And we are the Indian people supposed to enter it bearing the riches and gifts God has given India through millennia. But do we represent India, in other words, do we really bear the God-given gifts of our people? At present, no. It will take centuries of intercultural and open dialogue with the religious traditions of India, all that is honest and beautiful, authentic and unique in them, the art, music and other achievements of our people before we become the authentic India and represent our people. The early Jewish Christians, including St. Paul and the other apostles never considered that by accepting Christ they became different from Israel or that they had to renounce their religious and cultural heritage; but on the contrary, they felt that by accepting Christ, i. e., by participating in the suffering and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, they became the true authentic and new Israel, carrying forward all the true and valid traditions, riches and gifts of the people of Israel, but transformed and infinitely more fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

By identifying ourselves with all the valid religious traditions of India, the Indian culture, music and art, we have to bring to bear upon them the meaning of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ and make them more authentic and fulfilled.

2.1.1.1 A witness through identification with the heritage of India both past and present, necessitates not only an evangelization carried out at the level of the individuals

or small groups, but also one at a deeper level, worked out at the level of the whole. In our missions, we have a predilection for and preponderance over the former. We seem to have completely ignored the latter forgetting that it is equally, if not more, in consonance with a witness of identification like the former and that the Gospel and the promises of Yahweh have been addressed in the first place to people as people and not to individuals.

2.1.2. The suffering and struggling masses of India

The identification of the church with the suffering people of India is a necessary condition for presenting the Gospel relevant and credible. Here mission as participation in and continuation of the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ becomes a most compelling witness which will call forth the confession in turn from the addressees: 'We have seen his Glory, as of the only begotten Son of God'. Neither the Marxist revolution nor the R. S. S. fanaticism can compete with or contradict such a witness or block its community forming inner thrust.

2.1.2.1. Such a witness of the Church through identification with the struggling masses makes Eucharist not only a remembrance of the suffering of Jesus Christ in the past but a reliving of the same till his second coming, thus giving value, meaning and direction and hope to the sufferings of the struggling masses in India.

Such a witness seeks the truthfulness of the christian revelation, not merely in the perfect correspondence of the prophecies with history, but in the power of the Word of God in creating and transforming history and constituting those into a people who were not a people before. Such a witness through identification seeks to remove the disfigurement of the image of God in the suffering masses because of their living in subhuman conditions being chained there by satanic powers of certain human agencies, and recognizes that the more authentic man's humanity is, the truer it reflects the image of God in him.

3. A brief critique of our approaches and methods in mission

3.1 If we closely examine the approaches and methods in our mission work today they are to a great extent the legacy of the colonial times. Just like the foreign powers that first contrived to gain a foothold in the new country through various tactics and manoeuvres as part of a strategy for final conquest and annexation, the missionary also endeavours to establish a power base. Establishing an English medium school to educate the children of the rich in order to gain the favour of the powerful, converting a few individuals to be agents in the unevangelized community are only strategies for gaining a foothold. Though the goal is good and noble, namely the spiritual conversion of the people to God the method and outlook are purely political. The divine strategy for human salvation, on the other hand, is totally different. As the East Syrian breviary for the season of the Dedication of the Church explains, God created the world as a totality, heaven and earth, all the plants and animals and their head man, endowed with reason, discernment and wisdom. When man fell by listening to the counsel of satan God sent his only Son to take the nature of the fallen man in its integrity, body and soul and all his sufferings. By undergoing suffering and death in this human nature Christ transforms the whole creation and with it man from within in order to reconcile them with God. What the world is waiting for today is the full realization of this holistic redemption accomplished by the Son of God. Christ did not come to conquer but to surrender himself as ransom for many.

3.1.1 What we have to ask today is whether our missionary methods conform to the witness of Jesus Christ and of his disciples with its characteristics of identification and a pascal experience resulting in community building. In fact there are only few of our missionaries who have recognized the need for such a witness and feel confident in presenting Christ in terms and categories of Indian religious thought patterns, culture, art and music.

3.2 Even our social mission which is directly linked with the poor fails to achieve its goal because either it degenerates to a doling out of charities or to such projects where the utilization of the local resources, as well as, the conscientization and organization of the poor do not take place. This latter aspect can be realized only by a witness of the category of identification and paschal experience. But there are not very many of us who carry out a social mission of this type. We want to be prudent and safe, which is perhaps another sophisticated terminology for vested interest, self-deception and betrayal of the Gospel witness of identification on our part.

4. Seminary formation

If we want to make a serious attempt at gearing up our mission towards a witness through identification, then our attention should be focussed mainly on the seminary formation, theological training, research and inservice courses for the missionaries in the field.

4.1. Theology, both in its method of teaching and the subjects taught has been pursued in India as a purely academic and speculative discipline, heavily modelled on the Western faculty system, relegating theology and philosophy to the level of thinking rather than doing it and as reflecting of the Word of God in the concrete situations of the mission with the result that both the theology, as well as, its teacher have no mission or pastoral formative function. You have a separate formation team in the seminary with rector/master and spiritual director. Add to it a few practical disciplines like pastoral theology or a course in counselling and guidance. With that, the story of Formation is complete in the seminary. The bulk of the theological subjects are understood only as part of intellectual formation which have nothing to do with the Faith and personality formation, missionary motivation, field-orientation and field-relatedness. Only a theology understood in the sense of doing can change personality and equip one with the tools necessary for a life and ministry required of the student in the future. One has to take into account the distinction between 'notional knowledge' and 'possessive

knowledge'. The former, a set of systematically developed interrelated ideas and symbols, does not change the personality while the latter does because through it a person "enters into an actual and existential relationship with the reality that ideas happen to express. Ultimately only action can mediate this passage" (Roger Haight, *Mission: The Symbol for understanding the Church Today*). What we need is doing theology through a formation programme of action-reflection-action ensuring that notional knowledge of divine truths become possessive and transforming knowledge. But this purpose is defeated, when theology degenerates into a purely intellectual system with much high sounding talk of an inflated academic excellence.

One has also to ask whether the subjects taught are tailored to the needs of the mission? In order to obtain an academic degree, a student has to do a number of courses which at present are exclusively of a speculative nature without any necessity of a field experience or data collection from the field. Besides, the courses linked with Evangelization have no place in the present scheme of academic courses for a degree. Do such courses and other requirements insisted upon by the academic authorities force us to compromise with a need, goal and situation oriented missionary formation of the students meant for the work of evangelization. Should all the students go in for academic degrees under such requirements?

4.2.1 A Theology inspired by mission

Even the theological perspective has to be changed in the missiological perspective of India. In a country like India in which Christians form hardly three percent of the population only a theology inspired by the call for evangelization can make the Church itself really relevant. If the role and function of the Church is the continuation and fulfilment of Christ's witness of God through identification and solidarity with man in history, the Church cannot remain isolated from the rest ninety seven percent of the Indian people. It cannot remain a minority community protected by rights and privileges with its roots outside the country.

4.2.2 First of all it has to become distinctly aware of its immersion in and identification with the whole Indian culture and its focus on interiority and experience. An objectivist approach to faith itself and analysis of religion and life into categories of ends and means, strategies and purposes, rational premises and practical conclusions are alien to the Indian and Oriental outlook. Faith has to take flesh from the Indian background: God is not up there in the skies nor out there additional to the world of experience, but has to be realized as the all embracing self of one's own self and the ground and source of all reality. Sacraments, prayers and other *sadhanas* are not means to attain an absent God but expressions of the activity of a divine Spirit already present in the heart of each being. The world, human body and all activities are not something alien and evil to be shunned or ignored but the expressions and extensions of the Spirit in man.

4.2.3 But at the same time as immersing in and identifying oneself with all aspects of Indian religious culture one has also to remember one's unique Christian message. To be truly Christian and truly human one has to go beyond the level of nature and reason. God the Father giving himself totally to the Son in the eternal generation and in the divine self-gift of the Holy Spirit and the divine self-communication to humanity in the mysteries of the Incarnation and Pentecost have opened up a plane of personal self-communication for all human beings to share in: We have not received the spirit of slavery in a world of rubrics and ceremonies and of continuous striving for self-perfection but a spirit of freedom in the one Son to cry "Abba" to the one from whom all paternity in heaven and earth is named. Ours is not a world of rocks and trees, and no longer one of nature and reason, but a world of persons called to communion with the three divine persons of the Godhead. Mission work is nothing else than and nothing less than the establishment of this communion of persons in which each one finds happiness and fulfilment in giving oneself wholly to others and ultimately to the animating Spirit, the redeeming Son and loving Father of all.

Anto Karokaran

Comparative Theology

I

Introduction

By comparative theology I mean a prospective branch of theology which will draw on non-Christian religions for insights, concepts and terminology to interpret the Christian revelation and faith. Such a positive step towards the non-Christian religions is overdue, not as though it is a concession to them, but because we the Christians are now convinced of their worth and call to be in the service of Christian revelation and faith. We even realize that some rays of the Christian revelation may be found among the precious possessions of these religions. So much is already part of the official teaching of the Church. The Second Vatican Council clearly admits the possibility of having "true and holy" elements in non-Christian religions, the Church's readiness to accept them, her "sincere respect" for these religions, her recognition that there may be in them "a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men", namely Christ himself. She then exhorts her children to "acknowledge, preserve and promote" not only "the spiritual and moral goods among these men", but also "the values in their society and culture". That is, the Church is appreciative of as well as concerned about the spiritual and moral elements in non-Christian religions, on the one hand, and their social and cultural values on the other. This appreciation and concern of hers oblige her, first, to allow and assist the other religions to realize their fullness in Christ (*ibid*), and thus to "become the perfect Man, fully mature with the fullness of Christ himself" (Eph 4:13); and secondly, to accept and employ the concepts and terms supplied by these religions as tools in interpreting the Christian revelation and faith.

The above mentioned two tasks may be found closely related to each other, and even a little overlapping. But they do have the respective areas of activity: one is

concerned with the content of the non-Christian religions, while the other is concerned with their method of approaching and understanding the religious realities. With reference to the content, we are obliged (i) to recognize the true and holy elements in the non-Christian religions, (ii) to recognize them as a ray of the light of Christ, and (iii) to acknowledge, preserve and promote the spiritual and moral goods, as well as the social and cultural values in them. With reference to the method, in our efforts to interpret and explain the Christian revelation and faith we are obliged to adopt the style of thinking and speaking developed by those religions.

The result of those twofold step will be primarily a newer and deeper understanding of the Christian revelation and faith, rather than merely an attempt to make them more acceptable and appealing to the non-Christians. Therefore, it is, positively a theological task. Most of the Apostles in their theological endeavours had to depend on the Hebrew religion for theological tools, while the others among them, early Fathers, and Medieval theologians relied upon Greek philosophy. The Hebrew religion and the Greek philosophy were of tremendous help and sources of inspiration to Christian theologians of those periods, and have remained so till recently. They may even continue to be at the service of Christian theology in the future, too. But that need not and does not prevent us from looking for other sources of assistance and inspiration in the task of theologizing, and now we realize that the non-Christian religions can be such sources.

In this respect our interest in those religions is theological. The emerging theology is called Comparative Theology not in the sense that it makes a comparative study of Christian and non-Christian religions, but in the technical sense that it draws on the non-Christian religions for insights, concepts and terminology to interpret the Christian revelation and faith. It is, therefore, quite different from what is now-a-days known as Comparative Religion, both in orientation and objective. Comparative Theology is the task of those committed to the Christian faith,

while Comparative Religion is that of people not necessarily committed to any religion. One is in search of new avenues of Christian theology, while the other seeks a scientific understanding of religion as such and its particular expressions.

II

Reason and faith

Most of the Indian thinkers and systems take the existence of God for granted, and hardly make an effort to build up arguments to prove His existence. Their discussions about God are mostly concerned with His nature, and relation with the created world. Even when arguments for the existence of God are presented, they are considered either to be initial and unsure steps towards the goal or to be confirmations of the knowledge that one already has about God.

A unique feature of Indian thinking is that it does not make water-tight separation between philosophy and theology. Here philosophy leaves itself open to and frequently ends in theology, which then confirms and further explains the philosophical conclusions. An authentic thinker in India is always a philosopher-theologian. He may have started as a philosopher, but ends up as a theologian without giving up his philosophical position, but rather supporting it with theological insights. Or, he may have started with a theological insight or an instance of God-experience, and then develops a philosophical system to explain that insight or experience. In most cases it is difficult to say where one started and where one ended; instead, we always find before us one who is equally a man of *reason* and *faith*. He interprets the *data*, empirical as well as revealed, in the mutual light of reason and faith and tries to work out an integral vision of the reality. This is amply exemplified in the works of all the Indian thinkers, and especially Samkaracarya, Ramanuja and Madhvacarya. No one of them is purely a theologian or purely a philosopher. They are each a theologian-philosopher blend. Therefore, any attempt to understand them purely as theologians or purely as philosophers

is bound to fail, and does injustice to them. Of course we do not mean that they are all flawless in thinking and theological reflections. Indeed, they have their human limitations and prejudices which naturally have handicapped their systems, too, in a greater or lesser degree. Our efforts to synthesize their systems in a wider context in the light of Christian revelation, too, will be successful only to the extent we are able to transcend our human limitations and give up the prejudices. We must be prepared to give due credit to reason and faith, and give due respect to empirical as well as revealed data.

Pramanas: means of knowledge

The commonly accepted means of knowledge (*pramāṇas*) in Indian thinking are *pratyakṣa* (perception), *anumāna* (inference), *upamāna* (analogy) and *śabda* (verbal testimony). Generally they are considered to be valid only in the empirical realm of existence. Significantly, however, even the professional logicians (*naiyāyikas*) admit that these *pramāṇas* tend towards non-empirical realities. Thus, *pratyakṣa* (perception) is recognized both as empirical (*laukika*) and as non-empirical (*alaukika*). The latter included *yogaja-pratyakṣa* (yogic or mystical perception) in which an ascetic, who has developed his faculty of perception through yogic practices, can perceive realities that are beyond the reach of sense-organs. It is important to note that the yogic perception is not thought to be a gift from above, given to a few chosen people; it is rather a power in every individual, normally latent, but able to be developed through yogic practices, and made to operate. Thus, *alaukika-pratyakṣa* is not a revelation from above, but a normal means of knowledge available for any individual who would take pains to train himself in yogic practices. Therefore, the suggestion is that human perceptiveness, when properly sharpened, is powerful enough to reach up to the non-empirical realm of existence, where he can expect a "vision" (*darśana*) of God, which will transform him from merely being a philosopher to a theologian.

The ancient logicians had defined *pratyakṣa* (perception) as *indriya-sannikarṣa-janyam jñānam* (knowledge

that arises as a result of sense-contact). But the later logicians found this definition inadequate as it does not apply to *yogaja-pratyakṣa*, which does not result from sense-contact (*indriya-sannikarṣa*). So they redefined *pratyakṣa* as *sakṣat pratitih* (direct or immediate apprehension or awareness). What distinguishes *pratyakṣa*, then, from other types of knowledge is immediacy, not the use of sense-organs. In the Western terminology, it may be called intuition, only it should not be mistaken for any supernatural revelation, or an innate knowledge in man. It is rather a faculty in man which can be developed through practice, and made to function to bring an immediate or direct knowledge of even non-empirical realities including God, however imperfect and vague it may be. Then, of course, there is no denial of the fact that God comes to the aid of man who makes such sincere efforts to know him, and grants man a closer and closer vision of Himself: here the philosopher and theologian meet in mutual assistance.

The idea of *yogaja-pratyakṣa* further indicates that Indian logic transcends the purely rational thinking, and points to man's spirituality. He can transcend the purely natural level, and open himself to supernatural realities. This openness to the supernatural makes man disposed for divine revelation, and makes him strive for the experience (*anubhava*), which, as we shall explain later, is the infallible means of knowing the Absolute Brahma. Here, once again the reason tends towards revelation, and the revelation enlightens reason.

Anumāna (inference) also is thought to reach beyond the empirical realm of existence, and to point to non-empirical realities, including the existence of God. The *Naiyāyikas* recognize three kinds of inference: (i) *Purvavatanumāna*: inference of something on the basis of past (*pūrva*) experiences. For example, the presence of fire is inferred from that of smoke on the basis of the past experience of the invariable concomitance of smoke and fire. (ii) *Śeṣavat-anumāna*: inference by elimination of other possibilities. For example, Rama, who should be

There are not two but three distinct representations of reality for language users and language teachers: as before the lesson, the teacher's *target* (which may or may not be related to the target of knowledge), but as there are various other non-linguistic influences (e.g. social, cultural, personal) on what is taught, the *input* is not identical with the *target*. There is a third, *output*, which may or may not be identical with the *input*.

Language for specific purposes (LSP) (Figure 1)

The LSP teacher represents the *input*, and the *output* is the *output* of the *input*. The *input* is not identical with the *target* but is related to the *target* by the *input* of knowledge, *input* of knowledge, and *input* of knowledge. The *input* is not identical with the *target* but is related to the *target* by the *input* of knowledge, *input* of knowledge, and *input* of knowledge.

The *input* is not identical with the *target* but is related to the *target* by the *input* of knowledge, *input* of knowledge, and *input* of knowledge. The *input* is not identical with the *target* but is related to the *target* by the *input* of knowledge, *input* of knowledge, and *input* of knowledge. The *input* is not identical with the *target* but is related to the *target* by the *input* of knowledge, *input* of knowledge, and *input* of knowledge. The *input* is not identical with the *target* but is related to the *target* by the *input* of knowledge, *input* of knowledge, and *input* of knowledge.

The *input* is not identical with the *target* but is related to the *target* by the *input* of knowledge, *input* of knowledge, and *input* of knowledge. The *input* is not identical with the *target* but is related to the *target* by the *input* of knowledge, *input* of knowledge, and *input* of knowledge. The *input* is not identical with the *target* but is related to the *target* by the *input* of knowledge, *input* of knowledge, and *input* of knowledge.

The *input* is not identical with the *target* but is related to the *target* by the *input* of knowledge, *input* of knowledge, and *input* of knowledge. The *input* is not identical with the *target* but is related to the *target* by the *input* of knowledge, *input* of knowledge, and *input* of knowledge. The *input* is not identical with the *target* but is related to the *target* by the *input* of knowledge, *input* of knowledge, and *input* of knowledge.

For the comprehension of Brahma is effected by the ascertainment consequent on discussion, of the sense of the Vedanta-texts, not either by inference or by the other means of right knowledge. While, however, the Vedanta-passages primarily declare the cause of the origin, etc., of the world; inference also, being an instrument of right knowledge in so far as it does not contradict the Vedanta-texts, is not to be excluded as a means of confirming the meaning ascertained. Scripture itself, moreover, allows argumentation,...(and) declares that human understanding assists Scripture (BSB 1.1.2).

Sankara further says that, in addition to the Scriptural testimony, experience (*anubhava* or *saksatkara*) also is a sure means of knowing Brahma. What is more, according to him the experience (*anubhava*) is much more valid and infallible a means of knowing Brahma than the Scriptural testimony itself; and in fact the experience (*anubhava*) is the surest and final means of knowing Brahma so that all our enquiry into Brahma should necessarily result in its experience (*anubhava-avasnavatvat brahma jnanasya* BSB 1.1.2). There are two reasons why the experience is the final evidence of Brahma: firstly, the end-result of Brahma-knowledge is necessarily the Brahma-experience; and, secondly, Brahma being an objective reality, it is not something that man creates, but something that is presented to him, and as such he has to accept or experience it as it is presented; that is, man must objectively experience Brahma, rather than subjectively project it.

Thus, in the last analysis, experience (*anubhava*) is recognized as the final means of knowing God. The discussion so far about the knowledge of God and the means thereto may be summarized as follows: every human being has a pre-rational and spontaneous awareness of God as his own innermost Self and the ultimate Ground of the world; this awareness is supported and made explicit by the means of knowledge such as inference and scriptural testimony; here the Scriptural testi-

mony is superior to the other means of knowledge, especially inference; an inference is valid in attaining to the existence of God only in so far as it does not contradict the Scripture, but rather confirms the latter; the surest and the final means of knowing God is experience (*anubhava*) which is superior even to the Scripture; to have the experience of God is not only to have the knowledge of God (*brahma-jñāna*), but even to have the realization (*sākṣātkāra*) of him. "A mere intellectual understanding of reality is not enough. The end of knowledge is spiritual realization, *anubhava-avasānam eva vidya-phalam*" (Radha-krishna, *BS*, referring to *BSB* 1.4.14).

Para (transcendent) and Apra (empirical) knowledge

The discussion so far brings us to the Upanishadic distinction between the *para-vidya* and the *apara-vidya*, transcendent and empirical knowledge respectively. *Apra-vidya* is obtained through any one of the usual means of knowledge, including the Scripture which is God's revelation put in human words; *para-vidya*, on the other hand, is attained in *anubhava* or is given in revelation which man should accept in faith (*śraddha*), attentive and committed listening.

Apra-vidya includes all the human sciences, such as *śikṣa*, *nirukta* etc., and even the Scripture, as is evident from the above quoted text from the Upanishad. The point is that even the Scripture, although its content is revealed and infallible, is put in human concepts and words, and, therefore, is inadequate to comprehend and express God and his mysteries in their absoluteness. In other words, even the Scripture, as it comes to us in human categories of thinking and speaking, fails to bring to us the knowledge of God as he is in himself.

There is, then, the transcendent or higher knowledge (*para-vidya*), which supersedes the empirical one, acquaints us directly with the Absolute, the Imperishable, not through concepts and words but through immediate and personal experience (*anubhava*). By means of the *para-vidya* man comes to see (*paripaśyati*) the invisible (*adṛśyam*), ungraspable (*agrahyam*), unformed (*arupam*), eter

nal (*nityam*), omnipresent (*sarvagatam*), all-pervading (*vibhum*), exceedingly subtle (*susūkṣmam*) and the imperishable which is the source (*yonih*) of all beings (*Mun Up* 1.1.6). In other words, the *anubhava* which one gets through *para-vidya* is neither conceivable in human categories nor expressible in human words.

The two-fold form of God

A further understanding about God, which we have already hinted at, is that he has a manifest as well as an unmanifest form. They are respectively called the *śabda-Brahma* and *aśabda-brahma*, the sound-Brahma and the non-sound Brahma: "Verily, there are two Brahmas to be meditated upon: sound and non-sound." (*Maitri Up* 6.22). Here the idea is that God as he is conceived and expressed in human terms is the sound-Brahma, while in his inconceivable and inexpressible absoluteness he is the non-sound Brahma. The former is the object of *apara-vidya*, while the latter is the object of *para-vidya*. The human thought and language reaches only the sound-Brahma. At the same time, God graciously manifests himself through words and concepts, and appears to man as sound-Brahma, so that man may have easy access to him. The sound-Brahma is identified with the Scripture, the revealed word of God, and is symbolized by the sacred syllable *Om*. The human sciences, including philosophy and theology, can deal directly only with the sound-Brahma, and only indirectly with the non-sound Brahma. However, man's final aim should be to have the experience (*anubhava*) of the non-sound Brahma through *para-vidya*. But one can approach the non-sound Brahma only through the sound-Brahma, the revealed God, and, therefore, the meditation upon the sound-Brahma is a necessary step in attaining the experience of the unmanifest:

Verily, there are two Brahmas to be meditated upon: sound and non-sound. Non-sound is revealed only by sound. Now, in this case the sound-Brahma is *Om*. Ascending by it, one comes to an end in the non-sound. So one says: "This, indeed, is the way. This is immortality. This is complete union (*samyajata*) and also

peacefulness (*nirvṛtatva*)"...

Passing beyond this variously characterized (sound-Brahman), men disappear in the supreme, the non-sound, the unmanifest Brahma. There they are unqualified, indistinguishable, like the various juices which have reached the condition of honey. For thus has it been said;

There are two Brahmas to be known:
 Sound Brahma, and what higher is.
 Those people who sound-Brahma know,
 Unto the higher Brahma go (*Maitri Up* 6.22).

Now, to sum up, God in his absoluteness is formless, inconceivable and inexpressible, and, therefore, he may be attained by man only through the transcendent knowledge (*para-vidya*) leading to a direct experience (*anubhava*). However, in his religious pursuit man has to start with the manifest form of God, attainable through *apara-vidya*, conceivable through empirical images and imageries, and expressible through human words. Hence the relevance of having appropriate images of God for the religious man.

Apophatism

A natural consequence of the emphasis on the incomprehensibility and ineffability of God's nature, was the development of apophatic theology. It is a theology which finds it easier and more appropriate to say what God is not, than what he is. It is to think and speak about God more negatively than positively. Such a preference for negative theology was evident from the very beginning of Indian religious thinking. The apophatic method of theology consists mostly in denying of God all that is empirical, conceivable and expressible in human terms, for the simple reason that all that is empirical, conceivable and expressible in human terms, is necessarily limited, and, therefore cannot pertain to the Absolute. Thus, for example, in *Bṛh Up* 3.8.8 we have the following negative description of the Imperishable Absolute:

That the Brahmins call the Imperishable (*akṣara*). It is not coarse, not fine, not short, not long, not glowing, not adhesive, without shadow and without darkness, without air and without space, without stickiness, intangible, orderless, tasteless, without eye, without ear, without voice, without wind, without energy, without breath, without mouth, without personal or family name, unaging, undying, without fear, immortal, stainless, not uncovered, not covered, without measure, without inside and without outside. It consumes nothing soever. No one soever consumes it.

This passage is obviously a strong denial of all material, and, therefore, limiting, characteristics in God, who is pure Spirit, and, therefore, without any limit. The most famous statement in the Indian negative theology is: *neti, neti* (not so, not so), which occurs in *Bṛh Up* 2.3.6; 3.9.26 and 4.2.4. Observing that the realities in the universe are either formed (*mūrta*) or formless (*amūrta*), either mortal (*martya*) or immortal (*amartya*), either stationary (*sthita*) or moving (*yāt*), and either actual (*sat*) or potential (*tyāt*), the Upanishad declares that the Ultimate Being is like neither of them: It is not so, not so, *na-iti, na-iti*.

Hence, now, there is the teaching, 'Not so, not so!' (*neti, neti*), for there is nothing higher than this, that he is thus. Now the designation for him is 'the Real of the real'. Verily, breathing creatures are the real (*satya*). He is their Real (*Satya*) (*Bṛh Up.* 2.3.6).

Here, obviously the phrase, *neti, neti*, is not a denial of God, but a refusal to characterize him in any terms. He is fullness of reality, the Real of the real, the Truth of truth, *satyasya Satyam*, and for that matter he is beyond all characterization. Commenting on the above quoted text, Sankara says: "By eliminating all characterizations that are due to limiting adjuncts (*sarvopadhivīṣeṣa-pohena*), the phrase, *neti, neti*, refers to the Real of the

real, which has no distinguishing mark such as name, form, action, differentiation, species or quality. There is absolutely no such distinguishing mark in Brahma, and, therefore, he cannot be described to be so and so" (*Bṛh Up Bh* 2.3.6). In other words, *neti, neti* denotes that Brahman is not what meets the senses, inner or outer. He is not the object of thought, and even the highest stretch of imagination and the finest sensibility can neither feel nor touch it, nor the finest vital-urge can reach it' (S. Mahendranath, *Hindu Mysticism according to Upanishads*, London (1934, p. 57). Again the Upanishad says:

That Self (*atman*) is not so, not so (*neti, neti*). He is ungraspable, for he is not grasped. He is indestructible, for he is not destroyed. He is unattached, for he does not attach himself. He is unbound. He does not tremble. He is not injured (*Bṛh Up* 3.9.28; 4.2.4). You cannot see the seer of seeing. You cannot hear the hearer of hearing. You cannot think the thinker of thinking. You cannot understand the understander of understanding. He is your Soul, which is in all things (*Bṛh Up* 3.4.2).

He is the hearing of the ear, the thought of the mind, the voice of speech, as also the breathing of the breath, and the sight of the eye (*Kena Up* 2).

God being so incomprehensible and inexpressible, all our knowledge about him turns out to be imperfect and incomplete: "Him they see not, for (as seen) he is incomplete" (*Bṛh Up* 1.4.7). Even those positive statements about God that are found in the Scripture, are not to be taken literally, but only as approximations. Such indeed are the statements: Brahma is truth, consciousness and infinity (*satyam, jñānam, anantam Brahma*); Brahma is consciousness and bliss (*viññanam-anandam Brahma*); Brahma is mass of consciousness (*Viññanaghana eva Brahma-atma*); Brahma is consciousness (*prajñanam Brahma*); the essence of Brahma is consciousness (*viññana-maya Brahma*); and Brahma is the Real of the real (*satyasya-Satyam*). Sankara comments that all these statements describe Brahma by attributing to him arbitrary names, forms and actions (*adhyaroptia-nama-*

rūpa-karma-dvareṇa Brahmaṁ nirdiśyate (Bṛh Up Bh 2.3.6). He then continues: The proper nature (*svarūpa*) of Brahma can be described only by denying all the superimposed adjunctive attributes (*nirasta-sarva-upadhiviśeṣaṁ*); on the contrary, it is impossible to describe him by any positive characteristic (*na śakyate kenacid-api prakareṇa nirdiśtum*); then the only possible description of God's *svarūpa* is: *neti, neti*: not so, not so (*Ibid*).

There is of course a sense in saying that in God there should be the fullness of all positive perfections such as consciousness, bliss and reality. Indeed these perfections should be in God in the most eminent manner, as the Christian scholastics would say. God is absolute consciousness, absolute bliss and absolute reality. However, it would be stupid on our part to claim that we do understand what is meant by the absolute consciousness, absolute bliss and absolute reality. Our concepts of them are necessarily limited, and, therefore, the mode in which we understand them to be in God is far from how they actually are in him. In other words, the human concepts and expressions of the absolute perfections in God are merely approximations of what they really are; moreover, our concepts and expressions of them are mostly anthropomorphic and to a great extent merely mental constructs, and we have got to be contented with them until we come to have the *anubhava* of God through *para-vidya*.

Faced with the difficulty of adequately describing the own-nature (*svarūpa*) of God, and with a view to stressing his ineffability in positive as well as negative terms, the Upanishads have often taken recourse to a novel style of language, which may be called paradoxical descriptions. It consists in using at once mutually contradictory terms to describe the nature of God. For example,

The Brahma is made of... energy and of non-energy, of desire and of non-desire, of anger and of non-anger, of virtuousness and of non-virtuousness (Bṛh Up 4.4.5).

Unmoving, the one (*ekam*) is swifter than the mind (*Īśa Up 4*).

It moves. It moves not.

It is far, and it is near.

It is within all this,

And It is outside all this (*Iśa Up* 5).

The Self, (atman) that is set in the heart of every creature here is more minute than the minute *anorāniyān*, and greater than the great (*mahato mahiyān*) (*Śvet Up* 3.20).

Such paradoxical descriptions may be considered the strongest expressions of apophatic theology, according to which God in his absoluteness is beyond all descriptions, positive as well as negative. It is so true that even mutually contradictory predications may be confidently employed in describing the own-nature (*svarūpa*) of God. "...in fact, all language about God, as Aquinas so well understood, is necessarily analogical. We cannot speak one word about God; even to say that God "exists" is to speak in terms of analogy, since God's mode of existence is totally different from that of any other being. Of God we can only say what he is not; what he is can never properly be said" (Bede Griffiths, *Vedantha and Christian Faith* (Los Angeles: 1973, pp,6-7).

Verily, O Gargi, that Imperishable is the unseen Seer, the unheard Hearer, the unthought Thinker, the understood Understander. Other than It there is naught that sees. Other than It there is naught that hears. Other than It there is naught that thinks. Other than It there is naught that understands. Across this Imperishable, O Gargi, in space woven, warp and woof (*Brh Up* 3.8.11).

Epistemology for an Inter-Cultural Contemplative Theology

Several authors including Father Bede Griffiths¹, Jean Leclercq² and Hossein Nasr³ are today looking for an inter-cultural and interreligious contemplative theology. They try to reconcile different traditions such as Hinduism, Christianity and Islam in the common search for God, critically examining the role of reason in what is regarded as knowledge and the cultural perspective or mentality derived from a certain narrow use of reason. From a critique of reason and the old science they pass on to a discussion of a new science, the new physics, new biology, new psychology etc., as contributing to a rediscovery of the cosmic unity behind all things, and lending itself to the intuition of the mystics. Hossein Nasr in his *Knowledge and the Sacred* speaks of the *philosophia perennis*, a perennial metaphysics that expresses the intuitions, experiences and insights of people who look not merely for a rational intelligibility of things but a comprehensive and holistic expression of reality. This contemplative and integral approach promotes a theology that is rooted in the experiential, spiritual and even mystical view of the divine. Such a theology is a reflection on the experience of true believers, and on the sacred texts of religions like Christianity, Hinduism and Islam. It is also a spiritual theology which includes both asceticism and mysticism. In this paper starting with Father Bede Griffiths' critique of the rationalism of the old science and his experiential approach to theology I shall try to define the epistemology of the new

1. Bede Griffiths, *The Golden String: An Autobiography* (Springfield, IL: Templegate Publ. 1980).

2. Jean Leclercq OSB, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture*, trs. Catharine Misrahi (New York, Fordham Univ. Press, 1981).

3. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* (The Clifford Lectures, 1981) (New York: Crossroad, 1981).

science as shown by eminent scientists like Bohm and Capra and show its relevance for a new contemplative theology which is very close both to Indian tradition as well as to the monastic theology of West and East.

Fr. Bede Griffiths' Critique of "Rationalism"

Rather early in his life Bede Griffiths had experienced a subtle form of knowing than was conventionally available through reason, common sense and science. It began with his encounter with the mystery of nature, the mystery behind and surrounding it. For Bede, the first indication of the inadequacy of reason and science in terms of the larger picture of life, its meaning and purpose as evidenced in nature and being. This experience of nature was part of his journey to God and ultimate enlightenment. He expresses his fascination with the natural world and its secrets in this way:

"I liked the solitude and the silence of the woods and hills. I felt there the sense of a Presence, something undefined and mysterious, which was reflected in the faces of the flowers and the movements of birds and animals, in the sunlight falling through the leaves and in the sound of running water, in the wind blowing on the hills and the wide expanse of earth and sky." ⁴

This experience, which was a constant theme in his own studies of the poets and philosophers, in the literature and theology he was exposed to, was religious for him, and it showed him that there was indeed more to existence than he had thought, or was led to believe by his own somewhat skeptical bend of mind and independent nature, that were the prized possessions of a young English intellectual who was in temperament affected by the spirit of the Enlightenment. His experience of the Divine in nature was the cornerstone of all his subsequent experience and thought, and only later did he come to comprehend its significance:

4. Bede Griffiths, *The Golden String: An Autobiography* (Springfield, Illinois: Templegate Publishers 1980, revised) p. 28

"Always it has been understood that our life in this world, as Keats said, is a "perpetual allegory"; everything has meaning only in reference to something beyond... We only begin to awake when we realise that the material world, the world of space and time, as it appears to our senses, is nothing but a sign and a symbol of a mystery which infinitely transcends it." ⁵

But science, the "old" science that has held predominant sway over culture for generations is also alienating. It is wedded to the same "rationalism" as its basis of justification. Scientific knowledge, in Bede's opinion, can greatly increase man's efficiency through its application to technology, and can even make his practical knowledge more precise, and yet "it alienates man from nature and creates an artificial world" ⁶. It brings into being a world far removed from the ultimate concerns of man, and the natural rhythms of human existence, a world that insulates him from the secrets of nature and being.

If reason and science are cast into a new and creative role as servants of contemplative wisdom, then there can be a "marriage" between intuitive wisdom and scientific reason. Bede maintains that this is one of the greatest necessities of the future, if man is to survive and progress ⁷. Reason, which Bede regards as the active intellect, has to be united with the intuitive mind, which is the reflective knowledge of the self, in order for a positive change to occur. When this happens, reason itself then becomes intuitive ⁸. This marriage of reason to intuition does not mean the abandonment of the positive values of reason and science, of systematic organization of thought and logic, but their integration in a higher matrix of value. In such a "marriage", reason surrenders itself to the profounder values and intuitions of the Spirit ⁹. The capacity of reason is greatly expanded, and man is once again given access to the ultimate reality of the Divine Life. The

5. *Ibid*, p. 181.

6. *Marriage of East and West*, p. 159.

7. *Ibid*, p. 165.

8. *Ibid*, p. 166.

9. *Ibid*, p. 199.

very weight of modern science's discoveries have pointed in the direction of a larger view of things, of a metaphysical and mystical view that undergirds all reality, life, truth and thought. Thus, modern science, the "new" science is aiding the process of growth, if not by reform in its method, at least by dint of its own investigations and the results thereof, into the structure of the cosmos, the living organism and the human psyche.

The "New" Science: Capra, Bohm and Sheldrake

The "new" science is a term for a set of radically novel approaches to old problems, i.e., the nature and structure of the universe (physics, mathematics and cosmology), the formal causes of organic structure in biology, and the evolution of man from a physical level to a spiritual one, the evolution of man into a divine or "deified" being, the aim of some new psychologists. So, actually the "new" science is an attempt to find a more subtle understanding of reality generally and man/cosmos in particular. It is not only the discoveries and approaches that are new, but the spirit of openness in theoretical considerations that boarder on metaphysics and mysticism. There is no longer a fear of trespassing a boundary between science and the metaphysical-mystical realm of experience.

On an epistemological level, the first or primary fact of the "new" science is that of a shift in models, a shift from an atomistic one to an *organic* one. This has momentous implications across the board. For one thing there is a rediscovery of the cosmic unity going on in science on various levels, and on appreciation of the bonds that unite religion and science. The old antagonism is becoming a thing of the past, as scientists make discoveries, and see new relations that tend to confirm the ancient metaphysical and mystical wisdom systems. This is immensely significant for the future.

It is the cosmic unity that is emerging again into human consciousness, though doubted and denied by some for centuries. In our time, the more advanced scientists in most fields are conceiving the universe as an *organic*

whole¹⁰ or a system of totality in which all the parts are interrelated. This is the new vision of science. The new science is profoundly aware of the cosmic unity not simply as an ideal in theory, but as an actuality. It has a sense of the totality, of knowledge and being. Moreover, it seeks a larger vision of reality and truth, one which is complementary to and supportive of mysticism or contemplative experience not because of a new-found tolerance which allows it to condescend to it, but because science is itself discovering the essential truth of mystical knowledge and metaphysical wisdom. And so, the new science is becoming a bridge between conventional (or common-sensical) knowledge and contemplative spirituality. Here, I would like to present some examples of the new science.

One can start with Einstein and his theory of relativity, and with Quantum Mechanics, in order to show the breakdown and collapse of the old Newtonian model of the universe as composed of discrete particles of matter, or atoms in motion, following mechanical laws, an objective system in a universe independent of consciousness. As we saw above, such a universe is an illusion; it is not, nor can it be independent of mind. Einstein demonstrated, and his theory predicts, that the space-time structure, the continuum is dependent on the observer's position at any given moment, and that both time and space are part of an integrated or "related" whole, related in consciousness. This discovery was a terrible blow to Newtonian physics. The final blow to this system of physics came with the advent of Quantum theory, for it was shown that the atom is not solid or absolute, is not the basic building block of the cosmos. The atom could be split, and the behaviour of the sub-atomic particles simply does not fit into the Newtonian model. This was the real turning point, as Bede understands it, "the decisive moment when the mechanistic model of the universe finally broke down

10. Bede Griffiths, "Convergence of Religions and the Biblical Tradition", a cassette of a lecture given at the Esalen Institute, Sept. 9, 1983 tape 2, side 1.

and scientists were forced to conceive of matter not as extended substance, but as a 'field of energive'. On this view, the universe has been described as 'a complicated web of interdependent relations' " 11.

Two essential insights flow from this assessment. The first is that the cosmos is conceived as an interdependent organic whole, a totality. It is not a machine, but an *organism*, and the whole cannot be comprehended by analysing any of its parts — even all of them — for the parts are only intelligible in relation to the whole, from which they have their being, and in relation to one another¹². Secondly, this view entails that the universe be seen as "a dynamic system subject to perpetual change", which allows the organism of the universe to continually grow, as all organism do, by a continual change of its elements¹³. This discovery is a *recovery* of the ancient view of the cosmic unity, the cosmic whole of which we are a part¹⁴. So, here is an example of the new science rediscovering something of the ancient spiritual wisdom.

David Bohm's vision of the universe is the deepest yet into its structure. This is the view of the *implicate order* which is unfolded or *explicated* over the full range of the universe's development. The hologram is a good metaphor or analogy of how the explicated reality of the implicate order is present in every part: the whole is present in every part and vice-versa.

The discoveries of modern physics, as illustrated by Capra and Bohm, also indicate that mind or conscious-

11. Bede Griffiths, "Emerging Consciousness for A New Humankind: Emerging Consciousness and The Mystical Traditions of Asia" a lecture (unpublished) presented to a conference in Madras, January 1985, pp. 1-2. The metaphor of the "web" is Capra's, from his *The Tao of Physics* (Berkley: Shambhala, 1975).

12. "Emerging Consciousness" etc., p. 2

13. *Ibid*

14. Bede Griffiths, "Christianity, Science and Eastern Mysticism", a cassette of a lecture given at the Esalen Institute, Sept. 7, 1983, tape 1, side 1

ness is part of the whole and the process of its unfolding in the spatial-temporal realm, the realms of becoming. The cosmos is quite unintelligible apart from consciousness. The knower is always engaged with the observed or the known. The cosmos cannot exist of itself apart from consciousness, as Bede sees it. As Bede remarks: "We ourselves are a part of the field of energies which we observe; energy and consciousness, mind and matter are interdependent. This leads to a recognition of the limits of science. Science can never give knowledge of reality in itself. It gives knowledge of reality as reflected in human consciousness, that is through the senses and the reason" ¹⁵.

A further development in the new science, specifically in the field of biology is the seminal work of the English biologist, Rupert Sheldrake. This work is articulated precisely and exhaustively in his, *A New Science of Life*¹⁶. Sheldrake has reintroduced formative causes into biology which he calls *morphogenetic fields*, which are responsible for structuring energy, since energy as such is without form. These morphogenetic fields, as formative causes, bring to birth a morpho or a form, which then gives structure to the formless energy. Sheldrake has shown that formative causes have to exist because the universe cannot at all be explained by chance and necessity, as some have tried to do in the past. Form gives order, intelligibility and purpose to the universe, what in fact we discover in its actuality. And it gives this meaning and purpose to the cosmos on all levels.

The new science is assuredly more dynamic and responsive to aspects of experience that its predecessors would not have dared to take seriously. It has broken the bonds, the limitations of the old science by encountering the metaphysical and mystical reality. We might ask, however, what kind of mysticism is the new science compa-

15. "Emerging consciousness", p. 2.

16. Rupert Sheldrake, *A New Science of Life: The Hypothesis of Formative Causation* (Los Angeles: J. P. Tarcher, 1981).

tible with? What form of mysticism is it? Capra provides us with a rather clear answer to this question. After characterizing the significance of the new physics, its important consequences, he links these discoveries with Eastern metaphysics and mystical wisdom by way of a citation from Lama Anagarika Govinda's book, *Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism* and sees a similarity between the world view described in the new physics, atomic physics and the view of a Tibetan Buddhist. The world that Lama Govinda characterizes sounds very much like that of atomic physics. Capra quotes the Lama:

"The Buddhist does not believe in an independent or separately existing external world, into those dynamic forces he could insert himself. The external world and his inner world are for him only two sides of the same fabric, in which the threads of all forces and of all events, of all forms of consciousness and of their objects, are woven into an inseparable net of endless, mutually conditioned relations."¹⁷

What makes the new science significant is that it has and is discovering other states of consciousness beyond the merely rational and analytical level. It is finally realizing that other modes of knowing are possible, and do exist. There is a "marriage" between intuition and reason taking place, or rather, a recognition of the role and value of the intuitive mode of knowing. Capra himself admits this in relation to Eastern mystics, but it has validity universally. Capra comments:

"I see science and mysticism as two complementary manifestations of the human mind; of its rational and intuitive faculties. The modern physicist experiences the world through an extreme specialization of the rational mind; the mystic through an extreme specialization of the intuitive mind."¹⁸

17. *Tao of Physics*, p. 143 and *Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism* (New York: Weiser 1960) p. 93

18. *Tao of Physics*, p. 306

This understanding is also true of Bohm, Sheldrake and others. It should be noted also, that their visions of reality are compatible with Western as well as Eastern mysticism.

Perennial Philosophy: Hossain Nasr

The new science is aiding the rediscovery of the ancient wisdom that according to Hossain Nasr comes under the title "perennial philosophy", the ancient wisdom of Hinduism, Buddhism, Sufism and traditional Christianity. It has a unified vision of the cosmos as an organic whole pervaded by consciousness, in which man had a central place as the 'eye' of the universe.

As the 'eye' of the cosmos man has a faculty of intuition which puts him into contact with the Divine Reality in a direct way. It is a higher form of knowing than is available to reason, and is in fact a kind of illumination in and through the Divine Intelligence. By the emphasis placed on a direct kind of illuminative intuition as a way of knowing Ultimate Reality, the new metaphysics is found to be based on a mystical illumination. Hence the basis of his metaphysical approach is a spiritual epistemology. This intuitive epistemological doctrine rests on the *philosophia perennis*, which also rests on this intuitive experience of the Divine Reality. They mutually reinforce each other. In order to highlight some of the characteristic elements of this metaphysical approach, I am going to introduce Nasr's formulation here.

The perennial philosophy is also the *scientia sacra* or sacred knowledge which is the heart of revelation and what defines or encompasses tradition. It is the universal metaphysics, the primordial wisdom, the original revelation. The source of this knowledge is twofold: revelation and intellectual intuition which is an illumination of the mind and heart, an illumination which gives rise in one to an immediate experiential knowledge which is *sapience*, a tasting knowledge. It is a sapiential knowing of Ultimate

Reality, the Absolute. Father Bede Griffiths concurs in this view, and remarks: "..... Truth itself can only be known by a pure intuition which is beyond all language."²⁰

Scientia sacra is a pure gift from the Divine Intellect; it is not produced by a process of reasoning from experience which then would approximate the vividity and reality of the inspired state; it is the inspired state itself. One has sacred knowledge directly from the Source, from God's Intellect. This is a mystical way of knowing, a knowing in and through the Divine Intellect. It is totally opposed to the doctrine of abstraction of the Scholastics popularised by St. Thomas and taken in large measure from Aristotle.

Scientia sacra is metaphysics, and this term must be 'understood correctly as the ultimate science of the Real'²¹ says Nasr. And notice he does not define metaphysics in terms of Being. He regards Being as the object of ontology, since Ultimate Reality is even beyond Being, and ontology is a branch of metaphysics²². When Nasr finally comes to present a more precise definition of metaphysics — *philosophia perennis* — as the science of the Real, he states that it is "the knowledge by means of which man is able to distinguish between the Real and the illusory and to know things in their essence or as they are, which means ultimately to know them *in divinis*"²³.

Contemplative Theology

Father Bede Griffiths synthesizes three different modern trends into what he calls contemplative theology. It is grounded on a very deep faith, but an enlightened faith that is a form of illumination, the *photismos* of the Greek tradition. Here faith is alert, and awakened to the mystery²⁴. This theology is experientially based; it is always the fruit of a deep penetration into God's being and actuality, and His indwelling in us. This is the ideal and the

20. *Marriage of East and West*, p. 31.

21. *Knowledge and Sacred*, p. 132

22. *Ibid*, p. 136 23. *Ibid*, p. 133

24. Bede Griffiths, *The Cosmic Revelation: The Hindu Way to God* (Springfield, Illinois: Templegate Publishers 1983), p. 65

reality as Bede communicates it in his various efforts at verbalization, and of sharing. His contemplative theology seems to be the creative result of his own mystical prayer, or meditation and realization. It flows out of contemplative awareness and illumination which have evolved from his practice of meditation, mystical experience and reflection.

Ascetical practices, or *sadhana* involves *tapas*, chanting, scripture reading or *lectio*, liturgy and most importantly meditation, contemplative prayer, or what the Indian tradition calls *dhyana*. It is a more precise term for what the Christian tradition signifies by the word contemplation, or more specifically, contemplative prayer. So, I think the term is not only appropriate, but useful as well. It is this practice of *dhyana* or meditation which leads to mystical illumination, to enlightenment, or to *samadhi*, to the final awakening which comes after death. This is the ultimate goal of *dhyana* and is like the Beatific Vision, but of course it is not appropriate to use it interchangeably with the Beatific Vision, because we are not certain if the states are essentially equivalent. Basically, *dhyana* aims at *advaita*, the experience of non-duality or unity. Meditation aims at an experiential realization of the Divine mystery within one's own being, in the *guha*, or cave of the heart. This term expresses the depths of interiority where we meet God, the Ultimate Reality.

Contemplative theology is based on this inner experience, this interior awareness which is a secret knowledge, a *gnosis* in the Greek sense, and *jñāna* in the Hindu sense. *Jnana* and *gnosis* essentially express the same experience and awareness, the same level of depth. The root *jna* is the same as our English 'know' and the Greek '*gnosis*'. *Jnana* is spiritual wisdom arising from experiential realization in meditation, or illumination. It would seem to be an equivalent word for contemplative wisdom. The *jñani* is the one who has achieved *jñāna*, or is always achieving it. *Jnana* is a kind of transcendent knowledge that comes to a person who is united with the Absolute, with God. It is the same as *gnosis*. Bede's spiritual theology is grounded in *jnana*, his own mystical wisdom.

This *jnana*, or contemplative wisdom, that is the heart of his spiritual theology, is a knowledge of God's inner being; it is *Brahmavidya*, knowledge of Brahman, especially in the depths of the soul. It is also *Atmavidya*, knowledge of the Self, the presence of Brahman in the "cave of the heart". This knowledge of Brahman and knowledge of Atman gives us true self-knowledge. That is the supreme knowledge we all seek. *Brahmavidya* and *Atmavidya* are profoundly experiential, and so are quite similar to union with God in the Christian mystical tradition, at least in the way that these forms of spiritual knowledge are described in the Hindu tradition. They point to the same quality of depth that is achieved in the heights of contemplation. I think it can stand as a term for knowledge of God in contemplative theology. Of course, all these Sanskrit terms acquire new meanings within the context of a Christian's experience.

Contemplative, spiritual or mystical theology is also an experience of the Godhead, the *nirguna* Brahman, the Brahman without attributes, the transcendent One beyond being and knowledge Who is known in the darkness, like the Absolute in the system of the Pseudo-Dionysius. This is also the *sunyata*, or the Void in Buddhism. *Jnana* includes this experience of the Godhead.

But it should be noted that the concept of the "Godhead" occasions confusion; it is very obscure in the Christian mystical tradition. Pseudo-Dionysius and Eckhart both speak of the Godhead, following Plotinus' formless and ineffable. The notion of the Godhead is more elaborated in the Hindu tradition. Perhaps Hinduism can explain better the nuances of this very illusive dimension of mystical consciousness. At any rate, it is part of the contemplative tradition of both faiths, and so should have a place in our theology.

Contemplative theology is also the fruit of a knowledge by way of connaturality, for theistic mysticism is ultimately personal communion between God and the individual soul. There is no mediation by a concept, but a direct experience of the Divine Reality by way of a parti-

cipation in it. St. Thomas, quoting Pseudo-Dionysius, says that a spiritual man comes to know divine things through connaturality "by suffering them"²⁵. Such a one is exposed to them from within the Divine Subjectivity and knows in and through God's knowledge of Himself. God "does" the knowing for him. In other words, he knows through a pure intuition. Nor can he tell you how.

On the whole the aim of the new theological approach is contemplative and dialogical: it seeks to express the essential value of life: union with Ultimate Reality, with God. It is a living theology: it flows out of praxis, particularly meditation. It is dialogical because it attempts to advance mutual understanding and cooperation between the traditions, and where possible, convergence. It is a theological vision nurtured by the springs of experiential awareness of God within, in nature and others. Its very heart is experiential, as it seeks always the sapiential connatural knowledge of the Divine Mystery. And because it strives for a common meeting-point in contemplative wisdom and experience — and perhaps achieving it to some degree — it is also existential. In a certain sense it can be called a theology of existential convergence. It is highly reflective and self reflective, as it tries to understand reality, the dialogical situation, the Indian culture and civilization. In the quality of its reflection it is capable of great metaphysical and mystical heights, of subtle nuances and sharp insights, but it is not verbose, as some theologians are, nor is tedious. It is rather compelling and inspiring, as well as challenging, challenging because we must discover its truth. Finally, contemplative theology is synthetic, and I believe this to be one of its marks of genius. It is able to bring together and see the implications of a large variety of currents of thought, experience and culture. Always the circle gets wider as it finds room to accommodate fresh insights, discoveries and faith systems.

Fordham University

Wayne Teasdale

25 Summa Theologiae, I, 1, 6, ad 3: "...spiritualis homo iudicat omnia".